

liberator



- 🌟 Who centralised the Lib Dems? - Gareth Epps
- 🌟 What happened to Thornhill's race plan? - Janice Turner
- 🌟 Why so many at the food bank? Margaret Lally

Liberator is now free to read as a PDF on our website: www.liberatormagazine.org.uk and please see inside for details of how to sign up for notifications of when issues come out.

See the website for the 'sign up to Liberator's email newsletter' link. There is also a free archive of back issues to 2001.

THE LIBERATOR COLLECTIVE

Jonathan Calder, Richard Clein, Howard Cohen, Gareth Epps, Catherine Furlong, David Grace, Sarah Green MP, Peter Johnson, Wendy Kyrle-Pope, Tim McNally, Stewart Rayment, Kiron Reid, Harriet Sherlock, Mark Smulian, William Tranby, Claire Wiggins, Nick Winch

LIBERATOR

ISSN 2755-5097

was founded in 1970 and is produced by a voluntary editorial collective.

acts as a forum for debate among radical liberals in all parties and none

welcomes written contributions on relevant topics, up to 1800 words

We reserve the right to shorten, alter or omit any material.

Liberator Publications
Flat 1, 24 Alexandra Grove, London N4 2LF

DATA PROTECTION

We hold subscribers' names and addresses to fulfil our contract to provide copies of Liberator, and to contact them about their subscription. We do not pass details to third parties - unless required by law - with the exception of our distributor, who deletes the files used for address labels after use. To alter or remove your details or discuss any enquiry please contact: liberatorsubs@hotmail.com

INTERNET

Email: collective@liberatormagazine.org.uk
Website: <http://www.liberatormagazine.org.uk>

Facebook group: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/6806343091>

CONTENTS

Commentary 3

Radical Bulletin 4..7

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISTS 6..7
Liberalism used to be about enabling free thought and giving communities a voice. Has a series of centralising measures in the party stifled that creativity and innovation? Gareth Epps investigates

ALWAYS A REASON TO DO NOTHING..... 8..9
The Liberal Democrats have ignored two sets of recommendations on race because other equalities issues are more 'popular'. They will therefore go on losing to Labour in urban areas, says Janice Turner

SEEING RED OVER LABOUR..... 10..11
The Liberal Democrats face peril if they let voters think they are the same thing as Labour and fail to fight Starmer's party, says Gwyneth Deakins

THE SCANDAL OF THE FOOD BANKS..... 12..14
People in poverty are having to rely on donated food to get enough to eat. Margaret Lally looks at what drives them to food banks and how social security should change

SELLERS' MARKET 15
The Tories are supposed to believe in free markets, so why won't they let public sector workers secure what they are worth, asks William Tranby

WHAT'S GONE WRONG WITH MATERNITY SERVICES? 16..17
It's groundhog day in hospitals as each maternity scandal inquiry leads to a lack of action and reform, says Nadia Higson

TIME TO GET TOUGH ON TURKEY 18..19
President Erdogan is eroding Turkish democracy and allowing terrorists to kidnap and murder civilians in neighbouring countries, says Rebecca Tinsley

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES..... 20..21
Does an international system to combat tax evasion help tyrants and jeopardise LGBT communities, ask Grahame Jackson and Harriet Brown

OBITUARY:
ROBERT WOODTHORPE BROWNE MBE 22..23
Phil Bennion pays tribute to a pillar of international liberalism

LETTERS..... 24..25

REVIEWS 25..29
Lord Bonkers 30

Picture Credits:
Cover and design: Christy Lawrance
Pages 12-14 Margaret Lally
Pages 18-19 Mark Smulian

COMMENTARY

SILENCE NOT GOLDEN

Continental Europe lies just 22 miles from the UK, for 46 years the UK was part of its economic and political bloc and in 2016 - in the teeth of campaigns whipping up nationalistic hysteria, racism and hatred of all things foreign - 48% of voters still opted to remain in the European Union. A more competent and imaginative campaign might even have seen Remain win, it was that close.

With every opinion poll now seeing buyers' remorse among Leave supporters, and backing some sort of closer and more productive relationship with the EU, one might think the Lib Dems would enjoy having been proven right and be making something of this favourable turn in politics.

Instead it is as if Ed Davey had entered some sort of monastic order where the EU is concerned and sworn to observe strict silence.

His 'not the conference' speech last autumn managed one mention of Europe and with no emphasis, and it has otherwise been barely mentioned.

The party passed a four stage policy for re-engagement with the EU but - as the Leave campaign showed to devastating effect - people do not respond to detailed policy papers about complex processes. They respond to clear and simple messages about what someone wants to do.

As far as Remain supporters are concerned the Lib Dems appear to have nothing to say on Europe and as far as the 'regretter' Leave voters are concerned the party says nothing intelligible about what future relationship it wants.

The villain of the piece is an obsession with opinion polling. These polls tell the party that voters seldom cite Europe as an issue and the deduction is made that it is therefore not worth talking about. Voters instead want to talk about the NHS, the polls are said to relate.

There are two problems with this. The first is that Labour simply has a louder megaphone on the NHS and the Lib Dems will never compete with that, as even in target seats where Labour is out of contention its national media profile on the NHS will still be higher.

The other is that this approach might make sense if Europe were some stand alone policy issue separate from any other.

It isn't. Any politician with a modicum of creative thought could surely fix the blame for more or less every economic and financial ill faced by the UK on Brexit

The incalculable damage done to trade and investment by Brexit becomes daily more apparent, and as the public sees the wreckage and the extent of the lies told by the Brexit campaign a pro-Europe message ought to be saleable.

It is not as if the present strategy is having much impact. Campaigns on carers, sewage pollution and proportional representation are all very well, laudable even, but do not answer the questions "what do you stand for" or "what would you do?"

The Lib Dems languish at 8-9% in opinion polls even in the face of a Tory government publicly disintegrating and almost universally despised and deemed incompetent.

Historically this has been about the most favourable climate for the party there can be. Last time a Tory government was falling apart, in 1996, the party consistently polled 12-16% and the time before that in 1973 in the upper teens.

A friendly and productive relationship between the UK and EU ought to be the Lib Dems' issue. It can't be the Tories' issue since they did the damage in the first place and it can't be Labour's as that party is scared stiff of offending nationalist social conservatives in its former 'red wall'.

Keir Starmer's stance on Europe is to say nothing for fear of offending someone. Wrong headed as it that is, its at least explicable given Labour's need to appeal to both pro-Remain cities and the 'red wall'.

Davey's position is not explicable. There are not, and never have been, any Lib Dem votes to speak of in the 'red wall' and the seats the party seriously hopes to retain and gain at the next election are, with a handful of exceptions, Tory ones that voted Remain or very nearly did so.

There isn't the remotest possibility of hardcore xenophobes switching to the Lib Dems but remainers who voted Tory out of fear of Jeremy Corbyn in 2019 might well do so given the motivation.

A further problem will arise before long with Davey's Trappism. His and his party's silence on Europe is becoming so deafening that the media will inevitably fix on it as a way to embarrass Lib Dems in interviews by simply asking "what is your stance on rejoining the EU" and seeing Lib Dem spokespersons vanish into baffling convolutions.

Sensible as the actual policy may be it will look to the public as though the Lib Dems either aren't sure where they stand or are being deliberately evasive. This needs sorting out, and soon.

RADICAL BULLETIN

SOUND OF SILENCE

Politicians normally get into trouble for what they say, not what they don't. But Ed Davey's deafening silence on Europe has become so loud that it threatens some detonation at York spring conference from those who think Europe needs a higher profile.

Unspecified threats are being made that York should be a deadline for Davey to end his Trappist stance, not least since pro-remain Tories are the most likely switchers to the Lib Dems.

The villain of the piece is the party's polling, according to numerous Liberator sources. This shows 'Europe' is not cited much as a concern of voters, including those in the party's target seats.

Those around Davey have interpreted this as meaning that he should not talk about Europe at all - whether rejoining the EU, the single market or even merely seeking easier and improved trade relations and access.

The malaise has spread to Davey's lieutenants. When Layla Moran was asked on Any Questions about the cost to the UK of not being in the single market she was reduced to waffling. Daisy Cooper got a similar question on Question Time and replied setting out the complex four-stage plan adopted by the party. It was left to the right-wing journalist Peter Hitchens to say the UK should join the single market and why on Earth were no politicians making the case for it.

The thinking is that almost all Lib Dem defences and target seats are against the Tories and in Remain areas. The party will therefore need to persuade a proportion of Leave voters to switch and so can take Remain supporters for granted and should not offend Leavers.

As one senior councillor told Liberator: "It's polling - [Europe] dropped off the radar almost entirely over the past year. I retain a worry that it's important still to core supporters, especially as increasing numbers of people can see the damage." Some blame communications team head Baroness Greener for insisting Davey should avoid frightening the horses.

There was an almost total absence of mentions of the EU beyond the international section of the first draft Federal Policy Committee saw of the pre-manifesto paper that was scheduled to go to autumn conference.

While this ghettoised reference was fully in line with policy, there were no references to the EU elsewhere - for example in the economy, health or environment sections.

FPC is in charge of approving the new pre-manifesto for this autumn, and the actual manifesto, and keen European are confident about what they can get in there.

How to get Davey engaged with Europe emerged as the main point of contention when the Federal

International Relations Committee chose its chair. George Cunningham, who promised a firm approach, was defeated by David Chalmers, who favoured a more diplomatic one.

SUTTON WHO?

'Sutton Liberal Democrats are in the process of dropping David Campanale as their prospective parliamentary candidate after controversies over his former leadership of the Christian People's Alliance (CPA) and links with Hungarian prime minister Victor Orban's Fidesz party, which 30 years ago had liberal credentials but most certainly does not now.

Campanale has said he has been ousted because he wanted to vote with his conscience on moral issues such as abortion, and Sutton activists would not accept this.

He is though not going quietly. Campanale has opened a crowd funding page for action against the party, if his deselection is confirmed on appeal, and told an interview on the right-wing TV channel GB News: "Sutton & Cheam activists said now we know you hold Christian beliefs we don't want to deliver your leaflets."

He said he was called to a meeting of 30 activists who told him "you are religious, we are rational".

Possibly the Sutton activists got hold of the CPA's 2010 general election manifesto, which states: "It has been prepared by CPA Federal President, David Campanale."

Many sections are unremarkable, but this said: "A new hierarchy of rights has put the needs of sexual minorities above religious freedom" and inveighed against "sex in view of families enjoying parks and open spaces".

There was more: "The one policy that will make the most difference to improving the health and stability of modern society is for government to support and strengthen both marriage and family life", and "The CPA opposes Conservative and Liberal Democrat ideas to extend marriage to homosexual couples", and "Children living with co-habiting couples for instance are 50% more likely to have mental health problems than those with married couples."

Even if Campanale wins an appeal he cannot require Sutton activists to help him, and the place is surrounded by six seats the party either holds or targets.

SOMETHING IN THE AIR

Lib Dem London Assembly members Caroline Pidgeon and Hina Bokhari might be well advised to avoid Sutton for a while after a row about the London ultra low emission zone (ULEZ).

Labour mayor Sadiq Khan imposed this originally in inner London, where car ownership is low, in a bid to

improve the capital's air quality.

ULEZ requires owners of cars that fail to meet emission standards to either replace them or pay a large daily fee to drive in the zone.

Both Lib Dems supported extending the zone to the whole of London (not that the London Assembly's consent was needed) and so it now takes in places like Sutton where car ownership high.

Lib Dem Sutton retaliated by refusing Khan permission to erect the enforcement infrastructure needed.

Leader Ruth Dombey said 30% of cars owned in the borough would be non-compliant and "in a matter of months the mayor is expecting our residents to stomp up the cash to change their car or use public transport that doesn't exist".

Lib Dems in Richmond are understood to plan similar action while the third local Lib Dem borough, Kingston, is still to decide.

Some horse trading clearly then took place as Pidgeon and Bokhari managed to get Khan to stump up another £100m for the vehicle scrappage scheme and to invest £25m in buses outer London, including 'Go Sutton Bus'.

Beyond this lurks the question of who will head the Lib Dem list for the London Assembly in 2024 given Pidgeon has announced her retirement.

Bokhari is an obvious possibility but the party entertains the idea of winning more than two seats and Richmond leader Gareth Roberts, Brent councillor Anton Georgiou and former regional chair Chris Maines are among potential contenders. Indeed, Maines had a profile-raising run for his old job in January and came within two votes of beating incumbent Ann Glaze. The vote was 405-403, a barely 7% turnout, which suggests positions on the assembly list may come down to a small number of voters.

Whoever gets elected can look forward to a £58,543 salary for sitting in a glorified talking shop that lacks executive powers.

WATCHDOGS WATCHED

Speaking of talking shops, the new Liberal Democrat Federal Council is preparing to start work. Its job is to scrutinise the Federal Board, the latter now drastically slimmed down and with only three directly elected members.

With a requirement of 13 members – one-third of the total - to call a decision in for discussion and a two-thirds majority to overturn a decision the council is unlikely to disrupt the FB much unless develops sufficient 'soft power' to embarrass the FB if it acts stupidly.

That in turn depends on whether the council will sit in public (other than for confidential items), which is yet to be decided.

In notable results so far Anthony Hook defeated Prue Bray by one vote to become council chair, giving victory to the rather less establishment candidate.

Among peers' representatives Tim Clement-Jones and Paul Strasburger were chosen in preference to third candidate Sal Brinton, whose prestige has never really recovered from the strictures in the Thornhill report about her role in the 2019 general election.

HEALTH WARNING

Baroness Barker noted in *Liberator* 415 that

Ed Davey's "risible" promise on waiting times to see a GP was not first run past the relevant spokespeople in the Lords, and so it followed again with the announcement in the *Guardian* on 22 January: "A blue wall' offensive focusing on the NHS is being plotted by the Liberal Democrats this weekend, amid mounting evidence that the Conservative brand has been significantly damaged among crucial voters in traditional Tory seats."

Peers keep raising the problem of making unachievable promises on health, or other subjects, but the party communications team is hungry for things to communicate.

CRYSTAL BALLS

The Mitcham & Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet for the worst motion proposed for each conference is heading to North Wiltshire, which submitted a bizarre one for York called Ministry of the Future.

If taken it would have been summated by Gavin Grant who, whatever one might think of him, seldom associates himself with this sort of whimsy.

After a series of routine observations about public disenchantment with politics, the motion called for a cross party Ministry of the Future "where long-term policy ideas from all political parties, private members bills which have run out of time, the youth parliament and all British citizens using an addition to the petition.parliament.uk portal, can be lodged for further consideration, debate and implementation as and when the political will exists from Parliament and the government in power".

This pointless idea would be given life by "adopting a plateau management approach, promoting holistic thinking to planning for the future in the best spirit of the British Civil Service". A plateau sounds a suitable resting place.

PAUL HANNON

Liberator regrets to record the death of Paul Hannon in January. Paul held a number of offices in the Young Liberals in the 1970s and became involved with *Liberator* when it was based in Manchester at that time.

He was among those who moved *Liberator* to London and from its YL newspaper format to the present magazine one and served as editor for two years.

Paul left *Liberator* in 1980 and was later council leader in Newbury and chair of the Liberal party's assembly committee.

In the mid-1990s he joined Labour, and was later a Labour councillor in Newport and an independent town councillor in Fakenham but was latterly describing himself again as a liberal on his Twitter feed. *Liberator* offers its condolences to his family and friends.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISTS

Liberalism used to be about enabling free thought and giving communities a voice. Has a series of centralising measures in the party stifled that creativity and innovation? Gareth Epps investigates

A centrally-imposed constitution, filtered lists of voters to contact, centrally-defined leaflet templates..... All of this is the sort of stuff that might send the free-thinking activist of days of yore into a tailspin. However, in the modern-day Liberal Democrats it is increasingly seen as the norm, and accepted by and large.

However, it has potentially serious consequences for the innovation on which Liberal campaigning has thrived throughout its revival. If the Focus leaflet had been invented today, there would be a queue of Liberal Democrat committees forming to ban it.

To an extent, this is an inevitable by-product of necessary regulation, dating back to the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 [PPERA] and the Registration of Political Parties Act 1998 that dealt with various abuses such as the 'Literal Democrat' [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-27056001>] phenomenon. GDPR and its effects on canvassing should also provide food for thought.

GOLD PLATE

However, and instinctively, there has been a tendency to gold-plate some of this regulation. And the trend has become far more widespread than might be justified by the need for safeguards against rogue actors. In the early days of the Focus leaflet and for the first few decades Liberator was published indeed, diversification was far more of an issue than centralisation. Local parties did what they thought was right and probably only the advent of the Association of Liberal Councillors in the 1970s provided any sort of standardised advice on how a campaigner might go about campaigning in a way that took best practice from other areas. Other information was generally shared in a conference bar or a pub at a visit to a by-election.

Then, at least for some, the party's target seat operation brought with it some requirement for discipline. Material was still produced locally according to circumstances – but was copied to the Campaigns Department and, to some extent, vetted. In the run-up to the 2001 general election campaign I found myself artworking constituency tabloids for a variety of constituencies. The amount of common or shared material was tiny; the quality highly variable. The possibly apocryphal story that did the rounds was of one of the seats we lost at that election; the one which didn't share artwork and chose to run a final week tabloid highlighting our MP's admirably Liberal attitudes to what would now be termed 'culture war' issues. It must have seemed like a good idea at the time.

Things have generally got better since then.

Technology has played its part. The costly move to the Connect and Nationbuilder systems was seen by party centralisers as a great leap forward. From 2001, the Campaigns Department moved to a system of regulating target seat activity that moved from qualitative to quantitative analysis.

By 2010, even second tier target seats were required to send in monthly 12-page reports detailing how many of which sort of literature had been delivered, to which parts of the constituency, and other data figures, without mention of speaking to electors, understanding the issues being raised, and acting on them. This approach of course is the opposite to the ways Liberal campaigners gained power in most areas; it also failed to predict which seats in the 2017 and 2019 general elections were within the margin of error, with the result (for example) that Lib Dems within reach of ultra-marginal Cheltenham were told that it was in the bag and to go elsewhere.

The deluge of national direct mail of poor quality that hit letterboxes like mine in 2019 is unlikely to be repeated. Yet over many years, ALDC has moved away from an organisation preoccupied with local organisation to ensure Liberal decisions were made for the benefit of local communities - championing local innovation and initiative - to a very formulaic organisation; even a sort of centralising body that discourages local leeway in how to run campaigns.

The inevitable result is that new ideas and approaches won't be tried, creativity will be stifled, and when the central mantra fails, the results will be unremittingly dire. That the author of much of this approach is the incumbent party president may be an indication that more of the same is to come.

The English party appears to have got the bug too. A glance at the English party's new model constitution for local parties sees a number of new centralising requirements, including a compulsory full membership ballot requirement for any contested local party executive positions.

While this may well be good practice, the requirement is either to have a postal ballot, now very costly; or an all-member electronic ballot. However, the new constitution is remarkably silent on how such a ballot might be administered. If I were an officer of a regional party without specialist expertise in this area, I might be careful what I wished for. The numbers of designated local party positions have grown to what might be described as CAMRA-esque proportions; if ever there's an example of how not to encourage the best out of local volunteer campaigners, there you have it in one.

Then there is the matter of discussions with other parties and an increased centralising resistance in the English party. Following a review led by Andrew Stunell, there have been attempts to force local parties into running full slates of local election candidates, with regional parties offering up a range of potential sanctions to miscreants. There are of

course two types of these; for a small local party facing an all-up election, the threat of sanctions is somewhat beside the point. However, in many areas and bolstered by the Unite To Reform campaign, there are discussions of varying degrees of maturity, primarily with the Green party. At one level, these have become fully-fledged electoral alliances, leading to sharp swings of fortune in places such as South Oxfordshire (see Sue Cooper's excellent account in *Liberator* 412).

However, (and it seems to be entirely a matter of interpretation by regional parties based on their own prejudices) even successful agreements, mutually agreed, between Liberal Democrats and Greens are increasingly being challenged with local parties threatened.

In addition to this, the English party is imposing requirements for various campaign plans to be written by local parties of all shapes and sizes. A new elections officer position is required to keep a suite of campaign plans, updated regularly; although no guidance is available to date as to what these plans might contain. Yet apparently these plans "must be reviewed by the regional party after each cycle". I have seen guidance for this, not issued to local parties, full of words like "must".

My local party is one of the biggest, forming the administration on the principal councils, and the rigidity of the processes being demanded will considerably constrain our ability to identify campaigns and campaign according to candidates' strengths (one reason why we now win elections in places such as Bampton and Burford).

I shudder to think what the very many smaller local parties will make of these requirements, nor how regional parties will deal with the demands of running the many more merged or centrally-run local organisations that are the inevitable consequence of this.

The most centralising measure of all is the dramatic reduction in the number of places directly elected by members to the Federal Board, down from 16 to just three.

For a long time, policed notably by the late Colin Rosenstiel, a plurality of places on that body were elected by members, a steady increase in the number of appointed places insisted on by various bodies and nodded through by a somnambulant conference resulted in a Board of 41 members by 2019.

SHAMBOLIC CAMPAIGN

In spite of the Thornhill Report's clear conclusion that the shambolic general election campaign was the result of various dysfunctional relationships between leader

"Lib Dems within reach of ultra-marginal Cheltenham were told that it was in the bag and to go elsewhere"

and their office, president, chief executive and the poor bloody infantry, the latter has been blamed by the new leader and president, with accountability curtailed as a result.

A classic closing of ranks, maybe – but an erroneous conclusion that isn't going to end up well. Even worse, the new 'scrutiny committee' called the Federal Council in an inappropriate nod to

the Liberal Party Council, requires a ridiculously high threshold of 13 members – one-third - to even call a decision in for discussion. A two-thirds majority – of all members of the council, not just those in attendance at a meeting - is required to overturn a decision.

Those of us who have served in cabinet systems of local government would condemn such a structure as Stalinist suppression of democratic accountability, worse than anything Labour at its worst ever dreamed of imposing. The broader purpose of this Council, if any, is entirely unclear with it having no power of its own.

Another power grab at federal level has been inflicted onto formal party bodies, previously known as SAOs/AOs ((Specified) Associated Organisations). Essentially the two categories have been merged into 'affiliated organisations' that must have their membership and accounts held on the party's central software and change their constitutions to conform to a model one.

The old AOs were seen as a route to recruitment but now although non-party members can belong to them, they cannot be officers. As a sop, affiliated organisations have been given rather pointless powers to propose conference motions (which any 10 members or one SAO can do anyway) and propose policy working group members (where anyone could nominate themselves anyhow). It is basically another attempt to impose control on what are often small voluntary organisations that struggle with the capacity to handle such bureaucracy. Many will simply ignore it.

In summary, what may have appeared as isolated instances of centralisation appear to be part of a broader trend. What appeared to have been isolated incidences of a power grab removing the autonomy of Liberals in organising locally turns out to have been anything but, as more and more issues have appeared.

The stifling of innovation lowers morale, and the erosion of accountability of the new Federal Board is likely to have significant consequences when a significant controversial decision happens. The centralising trend, it seems, has well and truly taken hold of the Liberal Democrats. If some of it had been demonstrated to be anything other than a spectacular failure, there might be more appetite to repeat it – but it's not. The question is, then: who, if anyone, is prepared to reverse it?

Gareth Epps is a member of the *Liberator* Collective

BUSY DOING NOTHING

The Liberal Democrats have ignored two sets of recommendations on race because other equalities issues are more 'popular'. They will therefore go on losing to Labour in urban areas, says Janice Turner

At a recent webinar for party members the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Race Equality (LDCRE) was again expressing its frustration that the party had still not implemented the recommendations of either the Alderdice Review or those in relation to race contained in the Thornhill review.

The Thornhill Review, which looked into the party's disastrous campaign in the 2019 general election, had accepted the main points of LDCRE's submission. Among the Thornhill recommendations, accepted also by the party conference, were to implement the findings of the Alderdice review into party diversity, in full, with urgency.

It made the president is accountable for this action, in collaboration with the chief executive and party leader. Any deviation from the diversity review recommendations should be reviewed by that review panel's chair, in conjunction with LDCRE. Resources and a plan should be signed off at Federal Board by 30 September 2020.

Thornhill said the main change needed was changing the culture of the party to embed at all levels the concerns and interests of BAME communities and issues in all its activities, reaches out to the BAME communities and actively plans how it will achieve real integration at all levels.

It said resources – paid staff and investment – should in place to implement this.

The party should also develop a clear strategy which outlines ambitions for electoral success, in all types of elections, over the likely parliamentary period and how the entire organisation – national, state, regional, local, volunteer and employed – needs to use its collective resources to achieve that.

It also made the chief executive, in collaboration with the president and party leader responsible for a strategy that should be signed off at Federal Board no later than March 2021 and must: take the developed purpose and diversity plans as critical and interdependent inputs; leverage input from research and testing among a broad electorate, and specifically BAME communities and non Lib Dems, balancing breadth (quantitative) as well as personal, emotional reaction (qualitative); start to develop a specific strategy for our ambitions for the next general election and the plan for how we intend to use our collective resources to achieve that. It also said the target strategy should be revised to include BAME electorates as needed particularly in the most diverse areas

Why is this all so important?

First, it's obviously because this is what our party stands for. If we talk the talk we should walk the

walk, and our party does not adequately represent all communities. But LDCRE has done the maths and it's clear to us that if the party doesn't fulfil the Thornhill recommendations it is never going to win through.

The review stated: "It appears that our functional purpose – winning seats in elections – has too often come second to internal discussion and management; much feedback suggests that resources are being deployed on committees primarily concerned with operational decisions and minutiae and their own purposes and agendas, and that this is true at all levels of the party – national, regional, and local.

"That specifically includes planning, messaging and targeting for BAME communities with whom we have to become more representative if we are ever to genuinely challenge Labour. The Alderdice Review which explored the challenges of diversity in the party is another example of recommendations which are still to be implemented and could have improved our fortunes."

The Ipsos-Mori analysis of the 2019 general election¹ stated that 64% of ethnic minority voters voted Labour, 20% voted Conservative and 12% voted Lib Dem. And a study by Mercy Muroki and Philip Cowley [<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1467-923X.12654>] reported that a poll of London voters immediately prior to the 2018 council elections found that 75% of BAME respondents were going to vote Labour, compared to just 13% who would vote Conservative and 6% Lib Dem. A study reported in the Standard showed that in 2022 ethnic minority support was still 66%.

BLOCK VOTE

So much of the ethnic minority vote is a block vote for Labour. Let's see how that played out in the 2022 London council elections.

Overall we had a net gain of 28 seats – not bad? But this figure disguises the whole picture.

Out of 32 London boroughs, Labour controls 21 and has councillors on 30. The Tories control five councils and have councillors on 25. We have control of three councils and have councillors on 13.

The Liberal Democrats have no councillors at all on 60% of London borough councils. Of these 19 councils, 14 are Labour, four Tory and one independent.

There were 10 councils where the Lib Dems gained seats. In seven of them we took seats from the Tories and in one council from independents. There were just two councils where we took seats from Labour: Croydon, where Labour is so unpopular everyone including the Tories took seats off them, and Brent, where Anton Georgiou is campaigning in line with

LDCRE's strategy.

However, there were five councils where we lost seats and in four of them Labour took seats from us. In the fifth case it was Tower Hamlets where Aspire took seats from everyone – although the Greens gained one seat there from zero.

Unlike us, the Greens are taking seats from Labour. They took nine from Labour, in the process gaining a first foothold on four councils: they succeeded in Hackney (2 up from 0), Islington (3, up from 1) Tower Hamlets (1 up from 0), Croydon (2 up from 0) and Newham (2 up from 0).

Why can the Greens take seats from Labour but we can't? Because they are targetting the ethnic minority vote. Excluding Labour's self-destruction in Croydon, the only place in London where we have taken seats from Labour is Brent where LDCRE's strategy is being used.

So if we can't take seats from Labour and Labour controls 21 out of 32 London boroughs our outlook is bleak.

In most of the areas where our party has MPs, the local council has substantial Lib Dem representation. It seems pretty clear that if we can never make headway on most London councils, because we cannot make inroads into the Labour vote, then any progress in London seats will be limited.

Let me explain what this means in the brass tacks of voting in London. In a three-horse race a party needs roughly 40% of the vote to be elected. In a typical London constituency with a BAME population of say 40%.

Polls show that Labour can probably rely on 75% of the BAME electorate. So Labour starts off with 30% of voters in the bag, so they only need another 10% of the electorate to win.

If a party ignores the BAME community (40% of the electorate) it has to get that 40% of the vote from the white community, which means it has to get about two-thirds of the white vote to win. It also ensures that Labour's 30% initial advantage remains untouched.

The targetting strategy of the Lib Dems at the election, focussing only on areas that are most likely to vote Lib Dem, appears to have left out BAME communities on account of their likelihood of voting Labour so, particularly in Labour constituencies with large BAME populations, it has made it almost impossible to win, as shown in the London council elections.

The 2021 census makes this even more crucial. It reveals that across England and Wales 18.3% of the population is now ethnic minority (categories other than white categories).

The ethnic minority population of London is now 46.2%; in Manchester it is 43.2% and it is now a majority in Birmingham: 51.4%. The ethnic minority populations of many other towns and cities are above 30%.

Accountability for carrying out the Thornhill review's recommendations on race was assigned to the president in collaboration with the chief executive and party leader.

It has still not been carried out. Most of the actions have been widened out to take in all equality groups, which Alderdice specifically warned against.

As Alderdice stated in his review, "In the Liberal Democrats the commitment to diversity and the campaigns to make diversity happen have brought

significant changes and improvements for women and LGBT+ members and representation, but not for BaME members and representation, and I became convinced that if things were really going to change, this now had to be a 'Number 1' priority issue for the party.

"The party has a tendency to try to be inclusive of all issues at all times and that has an intellectual appeal, but it has not worked for BAME communities, because addressing everything means focussing on nothing."

There are countless examples in industry of how addressing all equality groups together means ethnic minorities lose out. In television, between 2006 and 2012 when the industry decided to take this approach, ethnic minority representation went down by 31%. In the film industry more recently, when the BFI diversity standards gave everyone a choice of which group to address, women were the main focus and again ethnic minorities lost out.

Alderdice concluded: "If there is to be positive change, the approach to race and ethnic minorities has to become a top priority. Liberal Democrats themselves must come to understand that liberalism means diversity and unless that can be seen in identifiable BAME members and representatives, then BAME communities, and indeed the country as a whole, will not be persuaded of the credentials of the Liberal Democrats on this issue."

NATIONAL TASKFORCE

There appears to be reluctance within the party leadership to act on the Thornhill/Alderdice recommendations. So LDCRE has proposed that the party set up a taskforce to take them forward, the main issue being a national, funded campaign to encourage and assist local parties to reach out to local ethnic minority communities. The core membership of the taskforce should be people who have already achieved this in their local parties, because some have already done extremely well and have knowledge that needs to be shared.

This proposal was suggested to the party leadership last summer. If there is no intention to do this then LDCRE will have to bring this together itself.

In Brent where they normally weigh the Labour vote, Anton Georgiou took Alperton ward in a by-election with a 28% swing by ignoring the party's targetting advice and canvassing the ethnic minority Labour voters in the ward. His strategy took us from no seats to three seats on Brent Council. In other areas where our party has got the message we are winning – in Kingston, Richmond, and Sutton Labour has been annihilated.

The bottom line is that our changing demographic and the evidence from previous polling and the London borough council election results shows that unless our party does what the other parties are doing, by implementing the Alderdice and Thornhill recommendations, we will find it very difficult to get very far in London in particular. Implementation of the Alderdice and Thornhill recommendations are an absolute priority and we trust that the President and the party leader will be challenged on it at spring conference.

Janice Turner is a vice-chair of the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Race Equality

SEEING RED OVER LABOUR

The Liberal Democrats face peril if they let voters think they are the same thing as Labour and fail to fight Starmer's party, says Gwyneth Deakins

It is without doubt that the Lib Dems have made good progress in repairing the post-Coalition damage in the last couple of years, particularly in three parliamentary by-election victories.

However, that has been against the Conservatives under the worst Conservative Government in the living memory of very old people. But where do we stand against Labour?

There are potentially serious implications in a failure to distinguish ourselves equally as clearly from Labour, at both national and local level.

There are three main reasons why Lib Dems need to get the message across "We hate Labour too – and so should you".

If we don't attack Labour and become just another anti-Tory party voters will simply vote for the biggest and most powerful anti-Tory party – which isn't us. (Even in places where potentially it actually is us.)

The many who are still not convinced by Starmer's Labour need to see that we are distinct from Labour otherwise they will ignore us, and in areas where Labour is our main opposition at local level it is vital that the national party issues messages that support our campaigns – especially in London.

VILE AND UNPOPULAR

Recent months have seen much Lib Dem optimism about the greater number of council seats we have won and our stunning by-election victories. Of course these are much welcomed but equally they have been won against a spectacularly incompetent, vile and unpopular Tory Government.

It follows now that Lib Dems' main or indeed only strategy is to attack Tories - targeting the 'Blue Wall' seats. And the message from top is that that's the only game in town.

Meanwhile in the real world, what is our approach to fighting Labour? There are plenty of places where Labour is the party in power locally and/or is our main opposition. We will never make serious progress there without backing from our party at national level. And we ignore the national picture at our peril.

Welcome to Cloud Cuckoo Land. There is a popular theory among Lib Dems that the next general election will be like 1997 when it is believed we did well because voters were not afraid that voting Lib Dem could 'let Labour in', as Labour was moderate and attractive.

I am not sure that that was true then and even if it was, it should not be assumed that that situation will recur. I think it is equally likely that many voters, while disliking the Tories, remained fearful of Labour and voted Lib Dem from that perspective. And there was simply not the same level of hatred for Tories in 1997 as there is now, despite scandals in John Major's

party and 'black' whatever day of the week it was.

There also persists a fallacy among certain Lib Dems that we are 'in it together' with Labour as 'anti-Tories' and that we and Labour are of equal virtue and basically not far apart on policy.

Accordingly, wishy-washy leftist think tanks are peddling the notion that there will be an anti-Tory pact at the next general election. It is unlikely that Starmer/Davey will make a formal pact as it would be a hostage to fortune in all sorts of ways. In any case we cannot rely on local Labour parties playing fair - anyone who saw how Labour campaigned heavily in Finchley last time without any hope of winning just to stop Luciana Berger from gaining the seat wouldn't trust them an inch. So basically as usual we are on our own.

Against this background, the public mind needs to be able to distinguish us clearly from Labour. If they can't, voters in our target seats could switch directly from voting Conservative to voting Labour even where we have a better chance of beating the Tories.

If we define ourselves merely as anti-anything without saying what we are for, and why, we deservedly get stuffed into the same 'anti-Tory' category as everyone else. Ultimately then we are simply an irrelevance. Now that Labour has (apparently) backed decentralisation of power and PR, the distance between them and us is to the casual observer even smaller. If our default position is not to point out our differences there will be even less incentive on the anti-Tory to vote Lib Dem rather than Labour.

And by failing to attack Labour we also lose an opportunity to attract support from several Labourish groups: disillusioned left-wing Labour supporters, the Corbyintes who have been ruthlessly purged by the Labour Right; people feeling disillusioned by Labour's persistent failure to embrace PR or by Labour's failure to commit to rejoining the EU.

If we don't appeal to them they could go Green, Nationalist or whatever, never to vote Liberal Democrat.

There are many key policy differences between Lib Dem and Labour. Those should not need to be pointed out but a quick summary could include our commitment to openness, transparency, and to working with people, not deciding what is good for them and doing it to them rather than with them.

We have a real and longstanding commitment to constitutional reform on which Labour has repeatedly bottled despite promises. Labour descends quickly into authoritarianism and secrecy. Lib Dems' commitment to the freedom of the individual – especially freedom from 'conformity' is fundamentally at odds with Labour's focus on collectivism, and placing loyalty

to the party line above principle.

We are clearly pro-Europe whereas Labour is reluctant and hesitant. We have a strong tradition of internationalism whereas the internationalist nature of socialism has long been abandoned.

Labour's commitment to the 'green' agenda is lukewarm and lacking in imagination. Our achievements on this in Coalition were clear.

There is no lack of material with which to attack Labour. There are numerous examples of Labour councils' incompetence and general bad behaviour. For example, Redbridge abolishing its public forums in favour of a litter-picking exercise with councillors; Lambeth being excoriated by the Housing Ombudsman for its failure to deal with its tenants' complaints; Sadiq Khan pushing ahead with the expansion of London's ultra low emission zone (ULEZ) with disregard for problems of practical implementation; and just try Googling "Haringey Council criticised".

The main danger of abandoning differentiation between us and Labour is that in areas where Labour is the party of government – at local level – we are condemning ourselves to oblivion if we have no critique of Labour and no means of persuading their supporters to vote for us. This is especially true of London and no doubt most other main urban areas.

As the focus in recent years has been on the overall number of council seats won in London little attention has been paid to east London, which has become a Labour one-party state. In boroughs where there used to be a fair number of Lib Dem councillors such as Waltham Forest, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets and Hackney, there are now none and even the Lib Dem strongholds of Haringey and Southwark have started to lose seats to Labour. The future doesn't look bright.

This could be stark in the next London mayoral and London Assembly elections. The Tories will win some support, and more than they deserve to largely because of the unpopularity of the ULEZ. They have little on-the-ground organisation and are demoralised by their national Government's incompetence. However people will still vote Tory if they dislike Sadiq Khan (and plenty do) but cannot see another credible alternative.

So if Lib Dems have nothing to say against Labour we can expect to have very poor results indeed.

A major reason for our failure against Labour is lack of effort to engage with ethnic minorities. More efforts are now belatedly being made but still there is complacency and not enough Lib Dems are prepared to tackle it even though London Assembly member Hina Bokhari is doing great work to galvanise local parties in London. This goes along with a failure to engage with disadvantaged socio-economic groups – the very people whose votes Labour take for granted yet deliver so little to help.

In a familiar vicious circle the more the party becomes composed of the educated white suburban middle class the more smug it gets about victories against the Tories and the less caring about our

“Where Labour is the party of government – at local level – we are condemning ourselves to oblivion if we have no critique of Labour”

support in other (Labour-supporting) areas. This is not new – see the national party versus Tower Hamlets Lib Dems in 1990s. There are now signs that the London region Lib Dems 'get it' but we are still some way from devising effective counter tactics. Where are the great Lib Dem electoral tacticians? Why aren't they looking here?

There are some factors working against us which we can't mitigate, including overall a somewhat better quality of Labour councillors, organisation and the inevitable surge of Labour canvassers on doorsteps just before and on election day.

KICKSTART FAILED

And unfortunately it must be stressed that conventional Kickstart campaigning tactics are no longer effective against the Labour tide in London. Plenty of London local parties fought the May 2022 elections by the ALDC book and made little or no progress. There were some successes against Labour but they were few and almost always resulted from special circumstances, technically known as luck. Where Labour fought us toe to toe they won.

In my experience some people in the Lib Dems still have their heads in the sand and think that those who lost to Labour didn't work hard enough or were insufficiently motivated.

Apart from being wilfully ignorant those people are also being intellectually lazy by refusing to face up to the fundamental problem.

I do not suggest that the Kickstart approach should be abandoned – you may not win with it but you certainly won't win without it.

But the big element that is missing is any support on the fighting Labour front from the top of the party. It's easy to say that Ed Davey doesn't quite get it because his own seat is always a contest with the Tories. But that's just not good enough. We can't afford to become an irrelevance in Britain's biggest urban areas especially London (consult Kings John and Charles I for how you fare if you do not enjoy the support of the capital). Absent that message from the top of the party the job of our Mayoral and assembly candidates will be deeply dispiriting and practically impossible.

To conclude, I repeat – the Lib Dems must demonstrate that we are more than simply anti-Tory, that we have a distinct and more attractive offer than Labour, and that we can effectively win against Labour at local level.

If you think about what a Lib Dem party which does not do these things would look like, it is not a pretty picture. Yet that is where our current party leadership seems to be heading. It's not a reassuring thought.

Gwyneth Deakins has been a Liberal Democrat councillor in Tower Hamlets and Redbridge

THE SCANDAL OF THE FOOD BANKS

People in poverty are having to rely on donated food to get enough to eat. Margaret Lally looks at what drives them to food banks and how social security should change

Across the country thousands of individuals contribute to or volunteer in food banks. In some ways this is a great example of communities helping each other but the massive increase in the use of food banks highlights the country's failure to look after people and is a national scandal.

The term food bank can cover a wide range of food outreach initiatives. Here we are talking about the type of food banks run by organisations such as the Trussell Trust which provide pre-packed standard food parcels (or baskets) to households in crisis.

Parcels normally provide the basics for meals for approximately three days. Their size depends on the size of the household. Volunteers aim take into account dietary and cultural requirements. It may be possible for recipients to swop some items depending on what is available and how busy the food bank is.

The parcels are mainly, or entirely, made up of packaged or tinned items. Some food banks may be able to provide fresh food particularly that which is near sell by date. Items such as cooking oil, toiletries, hygiene products, toilet paper and cleaning materials may also be provided. Some food banks will have a paid co-ordinator (or someone who has responsibility as part of their job) but most of the work of receiving, sorting and packing the food is done by volunteers who

will also greet users, check their voucher, give them the food parcel and sort out swops.

Prior to Covid-19 at least some food banks also provided refreshments and an opportunity to for users to talk to each other and the volunteers. This stopped during the pandemic but is being reinstated in some places. Some will host another support organisation such as one which can give advice on debt management.

PET FOOD

Some food banks will do deliveries. Occasionally it is possible to provide pet food and there has been news of food banks for pets being opened.

Individuals attending a food bank should have a referral or voucher from a relevant statutory or voluntary agency though some will provide emergency parcels to individuals who turn up without a referral.

Referrals are required primarily because food banks are not resourced to provide food to everyone who would like it or to make assessments of need.

In theory, at least, it is also important that individuals going through a crisis are able to access the wider support needed to help manage their situation (but there are limitations of that support).

Before Covid-19 many food banks had a limit on the



number of times people could attend whether in a year or in total because they are an emergency service that helps out in a time of a crisis; they were not intended or resourced to provide on-going support.

During Covid-19 this requirement was relaxed partly because it was recognised that individuals would find it difficult to access other services.

Food banks get their food from a variety of sources. Some comes from donations by individuals but they also get grants from local authorities and other organisations.

The Trussell Trust runs a network of more than 1,400 food banks across the UK. The Independent Food Aid Network has identified at least another 1,172 independent food banks. This doesn't include food banks run by Salvation Army, schools or other organisations.

There are also believed to be thousands of other food initiatives including food hubs which receive surplus food/food on the verge of 'eat by' date which is then offered free to the local community (sometimes a donation is requested). These differ from food banks in that a referral usually is not required although some food projects will focus on a geographical area, its more 'pot luck' what an individual gets; and it can be less than what would be provided by a food bank.

The Trussell Trust regularly publishes a rich amount of data about how its food banks are used. Data on increased use was a bit skewed by the pandemic when use increased and then dropped back.

Key points from its most recent briefing which covers the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 are below. It should be noted that this reflects the population seen by the Trust's food banks and the profile of users of independent food banks - which may be more focused on particular communities - might be a bit different.

From April 2021-March 2022 the trust distributed more than 2.1m food parcels. This is its highest number ever outside the pandemic, when it distributed more than 2.5m parcels, and represents a 14% increase on 2019-20 and an 81% on 2016-17 provision. There has been an acceleration of need since October 2021. But there are loads of other organisations operating food banks or providing free food so, of course, these figures do not give us anything like the full number of users.

There is significant variation across local authorities and the nations with recorded decreases in Scotland (-17%) and Wales (-4%) compared to the same period in 2019-20; Northern Ireland, Yorkshire and London are among regions with the most significant increase.

Some of this may be due to operational differences in how food banks are run and the availability of other emergency food provision but also policy differences, for example, the Welsh government continued cash payments during school holidays for families entitled to school meals.

“Qualitative interviews done by the State of Hunger research team reveal that people feel humiliated and embarrassed by having to ask for a food parcel”

In 2021 the Trussell Trust produced a detailed report State of Hunger in collaboration with Herriot Watt University and funded by Asda. The aim was to better understand the root drivers of the need for food banks so that the causes could be more effectively tackled.

The research predates the current cost of living crisis but it still provides some helpful insights. Its findings included:

- 🍷 95% of people referred to food banks in early 2020 were destitute, meaning they could not afford essentials.
- 🍷 The average household income of people referred was just 13% of the national average; 86% of households were in receipt of social security and one in five were homeless (it can be challenging to provide a balanced food parcel for individuals who do not have access to cooking facilities).
- 🍷 Disability was exceedingly common among households referred to food banks. Two in three of households referred included one or more disabled person; 62% of working-age people referred in early 2020 had a disability (over three times that of the general population). Poor mental health was an issue for over half the households referred in early 2020.
- 🍷 The main users of food banks were people who lived alone (mainly males), lone parents (generally female). Families with three or more children were over-represented in households referred to food banks by a factor of three times compared to their share in the population
- 🍷 Older people were under-represented, but some independent food initiatives may see a greater proportion of older people.

SUDDEN CRISIS

For some using a food bank will result from a particular crisis – suddenly becoming unemployed or a one-off large bill - but for many it is essentially chronically insufficient income. They may be in low paid jobs or in employment where income is uncertain. Some will be long-term unemployed.

State of Hunger highlighted that ill health or adverse life experiences such as eviction, bereavement or divorce are key drivers as they may compound existing issues and/or create additional costs undermines an individual's ability to navigate the system.

Often these individuals will lack of the support of family and friends to tide them over in a period of insufficient income.

Data from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that, even before the pandemic, destitution was rapidly growing in scale in the UK. But the cost-of-living crisis has clearly made this worse and this has followed on from the erosion of household financial resilience due to the economic and societal disruption caused by

the pandemic including the impact of redundancies, closed businesses and reduction in working hours. The increase in people claiming Universal Credit seen at the start of the pandemic has been sustained.

So more people are using food banks more regularly and more of them are people who have never used one before.

The increased use of food banks can also be linked to policy decisions. Failure to uprate benefit payments with the true cost of living leads to increases in numbers. The Trussell Trust notes that the increase in parcels provided has coincided with the removal of the £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit – which reduced the annual income of millions of people by £1,040 a year at a time when there was an emerging cost of living crisis.

The design of the social security system with built-in delays, for instance having to wait five weeks to receive Universal Credit and other payments also a factor.

The Trussell Trust spoke to one individual who reported having to wait eight weeks just to get the form to apply for personal independence payment. Households can quickly get into debt to the Department of Work & Pensions when they have to pay Universal Credit advances, loans, overpayments and so on. Benefit sanctions which were suspended during part of Covid-19 but are now being reintroduced can also drive the use of food banks.

Failures to uprate benefits and cutbacks in social security have taken place against a background of the erosion of the system under successive governments including caps on Housing Allowance, the Bedroom Tax and pressure on staff.

Food bank managers report that, while there are some examples of good support, statutory services are generally too stretched to provide the support needed to help someone move on from the crisis they are in.

The Trussell Trust research is helpful in dispelling some myths. Politicians have argued that people will go to food banks because it's free even though they could afford food; the more food banks or initiatives there are the more they will be used.

But the evidence shows that people using this provision are living on very low incomes. Qualitative interviews done by the State of Hunger research team - as well as the testimony of volunteers - reveals that people feel humiliated and embarrassed by having to ask for a food parcel. The trust's statistical modelling suggests that, on average and controlling for other factors, the increase in food parcel numbers distributed is not a result of increased provision but increased need.

Statistics are helpful in demonstrating the scale of the problem but can mean we lose sight of the individual. It is helpful to look the story of someone who is using a food bank. Here is one from the Trussell Trust:

“Aneita was working in education when a problem with her tax credits meant she was forced to use a food bank. ‘I was suddenly plunged into a financial nightmare, not knowing how I was going to pay my bills feed myself and my daughter, buy the things we need. I remember sitting in the waiting room, with my daughter, waiting to be given a food parcel. I was holding back my tears not wanting my daughter to see me upset and thinking ‘how has it got to this?’”

So many of us could quite quickly find ourselves in



Aneita's position.

There isn't one magic solution to ensure that no one will ever need to use a food bank.

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

But there are a range of initiatives which could substantially reduce that need. These include:

- The further development and implementation of the Liberal Democrat policy on Universal Basic Income would go some way to addressing this issue. In the meantime, we should campaign for a more effective and humane Social Security system which can provide everyone with enough to afford essentials. Payments should be uplifted in line with increases in the cost of living. The system has to work for its users. Delays in receiving payments must be addressed. A more sensitive approach to repayment of advances and overpayments and use of sanctions is required.
- Investment in getting people the right support at the right time to ensure that a short-term crisis does not turn into an ongoing problem of financial and food insecurity. This includes having local lifelines to provide advice and assist in accessing support as well as one-off cash-based grants.
- An inter-governmental strategy to tackle the major costs which impact on individuals particularly housing and utilities costs. People on low incomes often live in the most inefficient accommodation which they cannot afford to insulate, pay more in top-up meters, and simply have not got the time or wherewithal to work out how to get the cheapest deal on their energy or telephone bills.
- Greater support provided for people with physical and mental issues, particularly at the onset to avoid a crisis developing. The number of people out of work because of on-going health conditions has increased over the few years.

It is shameful that so many citizens of one of the richest countries in the world are dependent on Food banks. We must start to change that.

Margaret Lally is a member of Islington liberal Democrats and volunteers at a food bank

SELLERS' MARKET

The Tories are supposed to believe in for markets, so why won't they let public sector workers secure what they are worth, asks William Tranby

As I write, the Tories continue to wreck the economy and the wellbeing of the nation. Leading members of the Government are regularly interviewed in news programmes about their approach to the current wave of public sector strikes.

Several assertions have been made by ministers. The first is that any payments need to be affordable.

Clearly all Governments have options at their disposal and make choices to determine their policies. Paying increased wages can be afforded because there are three ways to pay for them - increase taxes to raise the funds necessary, change spending priorities by cutting spending on something else, or increase borrowing. All Governments have used these options in the past. So to say something is unaffordable is a nonsense. Instead, we are getting a conscious decision to refuse to pay.

A second assertion is that pay rises will stoke inflation, which Rishi Sunak asserted in one interview recently without challenge. This is also a nonsense for most of the public sector.

Let us remember that inflation is the rate at which the cost of goods and services are rising in an economy. How would a decent pay rise for nurses increase the cost of goods and services? More money in nurses' pockets would increase demand in the economy certainly, but that fits another part of the Tories' ideology - to increase growth. But there is no direct correlation between nurses' pay levels and inflation.

What irritates me the most is how interviewers have not used the right line of questioning to challenge the Government on this. Both the health and social care sectors have thousands of staffing vacancies, and daily the position is getting worse rather than better. Some commentators have reported that workers are leaving the caring professions to work in supermarkets for higher pay and less emotionally demanding work.

But no interviewer I have seen so far has ever asked whether, as a Conservative, the minister they are questioning believes in market economics. I cannot imagine any type of Tory, (although the factions appear to be increasing daily), denying the importance of markets. The next question is to ask whether labour markets in the UK are free for willing workers to participate in. They could hardly refuse to say yes.

The facts then are clear. The leading retail companies competing for 'low-wage' workers have protected their recruitment and retention of employees using market forces. Both Aldi and Lidl have increased their basic wages by 15% over 2022, and Asda and M&S by 8% and 7.4% respectively, with all four retailers voluntarily announcing two or more increases within a 12 month period, much to the surprise of USDAW, the shop workers union.

So, if a Tory minister believes in market economics, then public sector employers should be free to bargain within the labour market for workers in competition with the private sector. That is what Tories should believe in, but they do not acknowledge this, because interviewers are letting them get away with it.

A further assertion Tory ministers make is that they rely on the independent review bodies to make pay recommendations.

There are several attack lines that interviewers should be taking with this defence. First, the pay bodies are not independent for two reasons. Appointments are made by the Government and unsurprisingly they do not find suitable candidates to serve on these from the most militant (or effective?) trade unions. Secondly, the review bodies are given remits for their work, including a maximum funding envelope. Thirdly, most pay review bodies were given predicted levels of inflation which this year were well short of the 11% achieved by October.

Keynes was attributed with saying: "When the facts change, I change my mind" (although I discovered in my Google research for this that there are plenty who argue that more obscure academics first uttered these words). Nevertheless, it is clear that today's interviewers should be challenging ministers on this point, which is perhaps the most important one of all. If review boards had a more accurate prediction on inflation before they concluded their recommendations, they would surely be very different to the ones ministers cling to now?

We enjoyed low and relatively stable inflation rates for three decades but now the world has changed, so the so-called independent pay review mechanism needs to adapt to new circumstances. The Government accepted the need to alter the period for determining energy price caps from 12 months to six, so there is a precedent to change timescales for pay determinations for public sector workers.

I am naturally an optimist so am still hopeful we can find interviewers who can challenge the Tories on their fundamental belief in market economics. If it's good enough for their chums in the City of London, then it should be applied in the public sector labour markets too.

William Tranby is a member of the Liberator Collective

WHAT'S GONE WRONG WITH MATERNITY SERVICES?

It's groundhog day in hospitals as each maternity scandal inquiry leads to a lack of action and reform, says Nadia Higson

The Care Quality Commission's annual maternity survey for 2022 [<https://www.cqc.org.uk/publication/surveys/maternity-survey-2022>] reveals a continuing decline in people's experiences of maternity care, with many aspects, including care during labour and birth and postnatal care at home and in hospital, having failed to recover to pre-pandemic levels.

It would be simplistic to attribute this solely to the current staffing crisis in midwifery [<https://www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/nhs-midwifery-crisis>], serious though that is. The source of the current problems is more fundamental.

Over the last year we have seen the horrifying findings of the investigations into maternity services failings, first at Shrewsbury and Telford and then at East Kent, where poor-quality care over many years led to significant harm, and even the deaths, of many babies and mothers.

As the East Kent report says: "We have found a clear pattern. Over that period {2009-2020}, those responsible for the services too often provided clinical care that was suboptimal and led to significant harm, failed to listen to the families involved, and acted in ways which made the experience of families unacceptably and distressingly poor."

This "clear pattern" is one that we have seen repeated – in the Morecombe Bay investigation in 2015, at Shrewsbury and Telford, at East Kent and seemingly also at Nottingham, where another independent investigation is currently underway.

What happens – repeatedly - is that when a mother or her family has concerns about the care she received, and asks questions, maybe raises a complaint – the trust, if it investigates at all, will conclude that it was "just one of those things," that staff acted properly, that nothing could have been done... so nothing changes.

Sometimes external agencies – the General Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives, NHS England, the Care Quality Commission, and the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch – investigate and report concerns with the service, but these bodies never follow-up to see the results of their reports, so no action is taken, and nothing changes.

Eventually, one or a small group of parents make enough noise about their concerns to force an independent investigation as detailed above. These investigations have all revealed long-standing failures at every level of the Trust, and everyone has been horrified and agreed that things must change.

But as Bill Kirkup says in his Open Letter accompanying the East Kent report, which he led: "It

is too late to pretend that this is just another one-off, isolated failure, a freak event that 'will never happen again'. Since the report of the Morecombe Bay Investigation in 2015, maternity services have been the subject of more significant policy initiatives than any other service. Yet, since then, there have been major service failures in Shrewsbury and Telford, in East Kent, and (it seems) in Nottingham. If we do not begin to tackle this differently, there will be more."

Indeed, as a volunteer for the charity AIMS (Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services) I am well aware that the failings identified in the reports occur to a greater or lesser degree in trusts and boards across the UK and have done for many decades.

BULLYING CULTURE

There are failures of team-working, with a lack of trust and respect between groups of professional staff, and often a bullying culture which prevents more junior staff from raising concerns. There are failures to provide compassionate, respectful care, and to recognise and support the legal right of women to make informed decisions about their care, their bodies and their babies, even when these are not what their carers would recommend.

We at AIMS believe that the problems identified at certain trusts are in fact symptomatic of two issues which are endemic in UK maternity care. Firstly, that women are not adequately listened to or heard, and secondly that maternity services are not structured around the physiological, emotional and social needs of women as they move through pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period, but revolve around the administration of the Institution. This results in a significant disconnect between the people using the service, the people staffing the service and the people running the service.

Yet the solution is not hard to find. We've known about it for a long time. As far back as 1992 the Winterton report identified the problems with the maternity services. It was followed in 1993 by the publication of Changing Childbirth - the report of the Expert Maternity Group chaired by Baroness Julia Cumberlege. That said: "The woman must be the focus of maternity care. She should be able to feel that she is in control of what is happening to her and able to make decisions about her care, based on her needs, having first discussed matters fully with the health professionals involved."

It is a sad reflection on the resistance of our maternity services to change, that over 20 years later Baroness Cumberlege was again chairing a National Maternity Review, leading to the publication of the 'Better Births' report in 2016.

That said: “Our vision for maternity services across England is for them to become safer, more personalised, kinder, professional and more family friendly; where every woman has access to information to enable her to make decisions about her care; and where she and her baby can access support that is centred around their individual needs and circumstances.

“And for all staff to be supported to deliver care which is women centred, working in high performing teams, in organisations which are well led and in cultures which promote innovation, continuous learning, and break down organisational and professional boundaries.”

Despite the recommendations of the National Maternity Review being incorporated into NHS England’s long-term plan, and the establishment of a Maternity Transformation Programme to implement them, progress remains at best patchy, and serious failings continue.

One of the Better Births recommendations in particular has the potential to bring about a true transformation of the maternity services. That is for ‘continuity of carer, to ensure safe care based on a relationship of mutual trust and respect in line with the woman’s decisions.’

Under this model, every pregnant woman or person has a midwife, who, with support from a small team of colleagues, provides all midwifery care throughout pregnancy, during labour and birth and postnatally. As stated on the NHS-England website NHS England » Continuity of Carer: “This relationship between care giver and receiver has been proven to lead to better outcomes and safety for the woman and baby, as well as offering a more positive and personal experience; and was the single biggest request of women of their services that was heard during the National Maternity Review.”

Despite these known benefits, the Ockenden report included an ‘immediate and essential action’ for national implementation, that the continuity of carer model

“must be reviewed and suspended until all trusts demonstrate staffing meets safe minimum requirements on all shifts.”

This recommendation was made despite the fact that this model of care was not in place in the Shrewsbury and Telford NHS Trust and therefore had no bearing on any of the cases reviewed by the independent investigation. Indeed, had continuity of carer been in place, enabling a trusting relationship between mother and midwife, it might have helped to avoid some of the problems that arose from women’s concerns not being listened to or taken seriously.

Following the publication of the final Ockenden report, NHS England wrote to trusts announcing suspension of the previous target dates for continuity of carer to be implemented, though supporting the continuation of schemes and where appropriate further roll-out in “trusts that can demonstrate staffing meets safe minimum requirements.”

“There appears to be no effective mechanism for ensuring that individual NHS trusts and boards act on recommendations that do not suit them”

Unfortunately, this provides trusts who were less than committed in the first place with an easy justification for abandoning the whole idea. Once abandoned, will it ever be reinstated? If you think I am cynical, we have seen how long it took many trusts and boards across the UK that ‘temporarily’ suspended support for homebirths or ‘temporarily’ closed midwife-led units during the pandemic to get around to reinstating these – and some

have yet to do so fully.

This highlights another important issue - that of accountability. There appears to be no effective mechanism for ensuring that individual NHS trusts and boards act on recommendations that do not suit them. During the pandemic, guidance from the NHS and professional bodies emphasised the importance of allowing a partner to be present at all stages of maternity care - yet in many areas disproportionate restrictions on partner attendance remained in place long after restrictions in other areas of life had been lifted.

NHS England is now engaged in developing a ‘single delivery plan’ for the maternity services, which is apparently intended to synthesise the findings from Better Births, the reports into individual maternity services and the Maternity Transformation Programme.

This effort will only be worthwhile if all concerned - finally - act on the findings from these reports, listen to women, acknowledge that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and develop services that actually serve their individual and diverse needs.

What is needed are joined up initiatives that do not reinvent the wheel or create additional and unnecessary burdens of administration for already hard-pressed care providers, but which demonstrably meet the needs on the ground. Here are some suggestions:

- Recognise that ‘Maternity Transformation’ has to be more than a tick-box exercise. It requires a change in the mind-set of all decision-makers, managers and staff, with genuine buy-in to the fundamental changes required of them. It also requires support and training for implementing the necessary changes, including cultural and organisational changes.
- Re-establish the focus on continuity of carer, which enables exactly the compassionate, relational care which the Ockenden and East Kent reports show is so desperately needed.
- Ensure full transparency around how Trusts are implementing recommendations and monitoring of their effectiveness with measures not only of actions and outcomes but include measures of satisfaction.

Nadia Higson is a member of Tonbridge & Malling Liberal Democrats and a campaigns volunteer with the Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services www.aims.org.uk

TIME TO GET TOUGH ON TURKEY

President Erdogan is eroding Turkish democracy and allowing terrorists to kidnap and murder civilians in neighbouring countries, says Rebecca Tinsley

You could be forgiven for thinking the enslavement of girls and women by Islamic State (IS) was an episode from the previous decade. Yet 2,763 Yezidis remain missing, held against their will in private houses in Turkey and Syria. A network of Turkish businessmen trades Yezidis on the dark web, but the police are reluctant to intervene unless 'Ankara' gives them permission to liberate the women.

Diplomats are well aware this happens, but as with many things concerning Turkey's president, they avert their eyes, fearing president Recep Tayyip Erdogan holds all the cards.

Yet, until recently, it seemed Erdogan might finally run out of luck. His popularity has slumped as inflation reached 85% in 2022 and the Turkish lira lost 30% of its value against the dollar. His schismatic opponents parked their egos, forming a joint slate called the Table of Six.

But on 14 December, Ekrem Imamoglu, the popular mayor of Istanbul and Erdogan's most credible challenger, - and the likely Table of Six nominee - was convicted of "insulting public officials" after he called someone an idiot.

The two-years and seven months prison sentence effectively eliminated him from the June 2023 presidential race. Crossbencher Lord Alton tabled a question challenging the UK to join the US and the EU in condemning Erdogan's self-interested manoeuvre: at the time of writing the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) remains silent. Turkey's status as the UK's third biggest market for arms exports (£306 million in 2021) might explain this reticence to comment.

Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian and intolerant rule should focus the attention of democrats and those who care about human rights and religious freedom. Yet, the Turkish leader continues to exert

disproportionate influence over the international community despite, or perhaps because of, his thuggish behaviour.

Last month, he warned Greece that Turkish missiles could reach Athens, a fellow NATO member. He is threatening to veto Finland and Sweden's bids to join NATO. He has inserted himself between Russia and the West, facilitating negotiations over grain shipments from Ukraine; and in 2016 the EU began paying him an estimated six billion euros (so far) to prevent four million Syrian refugees heading for Europe

to claim asylum.

I have visited the mountains in Iraqi Kurdistan where his air force regularly bombs, killing innocent civilians in their hunt for Kurdish insurgents.

Erdogan is also threatening to invade northern Syria for the same reason, potentially provoking massive emigration. The West has hardly commented on this, or Erdogan's recent overtures to Syria's

president Bashar

Assad, perhaps because Turkey hosts NATO's Incirlik military base which is considered more strategically important than the lives of villagers in northern Iraq or seeking justice for the hundreds of thousands of Syrians killed by the Syrian regime.

The West has also turned a blind eye to what Freedom House calls Erdogan's "growing contempt for political rights and civil liberties" during his two decades in power. Friends of Erdogan control 90% of the media, and Turkey ranks fourth in the world for jailing journalists, behind Iran, China, and Myanmar.

Those members of the media questioning the decision to imprison Istanbul's mayor face harsh fines. To quote my ex-pat Turkish humanitarian aid worker acquaintance (name withheld for her safety), "Every time I go home, more and more of my friends from university days are in prison."

The West routinely describes Erdogan as a moderate Islamist, a contradiction in terms according to some



scholars. Erdogan himself has rejected the notion that he is a moderate, and until recently (see below) he was a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. He views Muslims as exceptional, saying they are incapable of committing genocide, (Armenians may disagree). On a trivial level, his deputy prime minister told women not to laugh in public, giving rise to thousands of Turkish women laughing in social media posts.

“I have visited the mountains in Iraqi Kurdistan where his air force regularly bombs, killing innocent civilians in their hunt for Kurdish insurgents”

Erdogan’s much flaunted piety deserves closer examination, too. Using \$615m of tax-payers’ funds he has built a 1,000 room palace in Ankara furnished with gold bathroom fittings and luxurious Petro-Arab vulgarity. It is three times the size of Versailles. (For the record, Putin’s palace on the Black Sea puts Erdogan’s pile to shame: it has a price tag of \$1.4bn on grounds 39 times the size of Monaco, with an underground hockey rink and private strip club). Diplomats describe Mrs Erdogan as the most boring and materialistic person they have ever encountered, apparently as happy in the shopping mall as in the mosque, but never seen without a headscarf.

Erdogan’s tolerance of IS’s presence and activities in Turkey should have raised the alarm years ago. The US Treasury Department believes that since 2014, Turkey has been a key jurisdiction that IS exploits for smuggling militants, weapons and funds to Syria via currency bureaux and jewellers stores. The same network facilitated the export of antiquities and oil from Iraq and Syria. Sources in Iraqi Kurdistan told me IS continues to earn millions a month from this massive illicit cross border activity. It is therefore naïve to assume IS has been defeated while they continue to run protection rackets in Iraq, threatening (and sometimes killing) police and local officials.

The US special envoy for the international coalition against the Islamic State, Brett McGurk, wrote that although president Barack Obama repeatedly asked Erdogan, “to control the Turkish border with Syria,” through which IS fighters and materiel “flowed freely,” Erdogan “took no action.” Following a US Special Operations Forces raid that killed IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, McGurk said that Turkey “has some explaining to do,” since Baghdadi was found “just a few miles from Turkey’s border,” in a province “protected by a dozen Turkish military outposts since early 2018.”

On 5 January, the US Treasury designated IS’s financial network in Turkey, including four individuals and two entities (Wadi Alrrafidayn Foodstuffs and Sham Express) for their role in recruiting for IS and facilitating financial transfers. Let’s hope the UK follows suit, but don’t hold your breath.

Pari Ibrahim of the Free Yezidi Foundation points out that 2,763 Yezidi women and children remain missing, following their abduction by IS in 2014. Many are traded multiple times on ‘deep web’ social media in Turkey. The families of several hostages have rescued women from homes in the Ankara area where they were enslaved.

When a Yezidi family presented local Turkish police with proof that an enslaved woman was being held in their district, officers reluctantly admitted they were unable to act without permission from Ankara, meaning the president’s office. A Turkish journalist highlighting the network of Islamist traders and business people involved was himself harassed by the security services: the network he was investigating was not questioned and continues to function. Just to be clear,

IS justifies killing and enslaving Yezidi because they believe they are polytheists. They say Muslims are doing Allah’s work when they rape and kill Yezidi.

Christians should also be concerned by the increasingly difficult environment facing Turkey’s 180,000 Christians, and architecture lovers should care about the neglect of Hagia Sophia and other historic Christian monuments. Last month, Aid to the Church in Need published its 2020-22 report describing the desecration of church property, the harassment of Christians and the precarious legal status of most Christians sects in Turkey.

The international community remains largely mute on Erdogan’s track record because it believes that he holds several cards including the threat to invade northern Syria and Iraq, to veto Finnish and Swedish membership of NATO, to open his borders to allow four million Syrians to reach the EU, to prevent water reaching his southern neighbours and to leave NATO and move closer to Moscow.

However, Erdogan has shown he is open to changing course when put under pressure. He was formerly an active supporter of the worldwide Muslim Brotherhood, but as Turkey’s economy has worsened, he has turned to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE for financial help, toning down his rhetoric and forgetting about the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul in 2018.

He is also making nice with Assad because Turkish public opinion is fed up with hosting nearly four million Syrian refugees. Erdogan is hoping to persuade Assad, whom he vilified for years, to facilitate their return.

A unified and consistent multilateral approach to Erdogan’s threats to the international community and in particular the West would neutralise their potency. Does Erdogan, overseer of a battered economy, wish to invite the inevitable sanctions if he sided with Russia? Does the Turkish president want to imperil the flow of billions of euros into his treasury from the EU, his biggest trading partner? Does he wish to continue buying US F16s and American nuclear power technology? Calling his bluff as he extends his corrupt and authoritarian rule might be a wiser approach than appeasing him. Condemning the prison sentence against the mayor of Istanbul would be a good place to start.

Rebecca Tinsley is the founder of www.WagingPeace.info [<https://wagingpeace.info>] A version of this article appeared in Independent Catholic News

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Does an international system to combat tax evasion help tyrants and jeopardise LGBT communities, ask Grahame Jackson and Harriet Brown

Imagine a world in which you have fled a country, Country X. This country has killed your parents and burnt your house down. You escape. It's a long and arduous journey and you end up in Britain, or France, or Germany or Italy, or any other developed economy. How would you feel if you got a job in a bank, and someone said: "OK, because people avoid tax, we send information to Country X about people who live in Country X to help it collect tax"?

For years a preoccupying 'global' aim has been to reduce tax avoidance; this article does not advocate for tax avoidance, or for allowing it to happen. We do not believe that abusing the principle - established by the English courts many years ago - that a person is entitled to organise their affairs so that they pay less tax, is a sustainable method of approach for either professionals or taxpayers.

It is a detriment to the tax base and, therefore, a detriment to every one of us.

GREATER EVILS

However, it is also fair to say that we do consider there to be greater evils. It is important for policymakers to understand that the requirements imposed by international tax information exchange regimes might have something other than a purely tax effect so that a balancing of the 'evil' of tax avoidance must be balanced against the other 'evils' that fall to be considered.

So, let's understand what we are talking about. For the last 25 years the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (as a result of instructions from the G7 and G20) has been mounting a number of projects which have now been distilled into the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) project. One of the main pillars of this is the implementation of a global information exchange regime between tax authorities called the Common Reporting Standard (CRS).

The CRS is designed to allow countries to exchange information between themselves about the financial accounts held by residents of one country in another country. The aim of this is to prevent individuals avoiding (or evading – its original primary purpose) tax in their country of residence. This is achieved by the authority in one country providing information that 'financial institutions' (rightly, included in quotation marks since its definition includes many things that would not ordinarily be considered as such) are obliged to provide to the authority in the other countries.

Before 1999 a person in the UK could just put money

into a bank account in, say, Jersey, or France, or Denmark, or India or wherever and without a specific request for information that account would remain secret, and tax would not be paid in the UK on any income earned from the deposit, unless the taxpayer themselves declared it. CRS is designed to stop that being possible.

The design of CRS means that it requires cooperation between not only tax authorities but also financial institutions, which are required to identify all non-resident account holders and report to their local authority the name, address, tax identification number and value of the account of the non-resident account holder.

This is aimed at stopping people 'hiding' money in low tax jurisdictions and failing to declare that money. That is a laudable aim and the CRS and its predecessor the EU Savings Directive has brought an end to much of the low-level tax evasion that was previously occurring using offshore accounts in the names of individuals. It is not foolproof but the CRS in conjunction with other provisions is a very powerful tool in the armoury of tax authorities.

However, it does have some unintended consequences. The system is intended to be reciprocal in nature and in the ordinary course of things countries which are participants exchange information with all other countries with which they have 'activated exchange relationships'.

In short, the information must flow both ways (there are certain circumstances where information will only flow one way – a key example being some Caribbean countries that have no income tax, and therefore no need for tax information, which nonetheless provide information to other countries. Why they do this requires a consideration of the prevalent political climate that is beyond the scope of this article).

In order to be truly effective, the CRS must include as many jurisdictions as possible. It is also attractive to jurisdictions to join. After all, what cash hungry country would not want to be able to detect its residents' bank accounts in foreign banks? And so, a combination of self interest and the OECD's desire to cover the globe in its entirety with this regime has led to a total of 119 jurisdictions becoming what are known as 'participating jurisdictions' by November 2022.

The list continues to grow; in December 2022 Burkina Faso entered into the Amended Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters which is the framework document that allows the CRS to operate (and also mandates information being exchanged on demand in some cases). There are also now more than

3,300 ‘activated exchange relationships’, which are bilateral agreements between two jurisdictions to exchange the necessary information, rather than merely a commitment to the principle of the CR).

This is all well and good when viewed from a Western or OECD perspective. The continued expansion of ‘participating jurisdictions’ means that coverage of the anti-tax avoidance net continues to grow and the benefits of that are available to countries not only in the high-income bracket but also in the lower income bracket; surely that will help economic development and political and social change will flow?

This would seem to us to be naïve. The ever-increasing demand for 100% coverage (setting aside the USA’s refusal to join in) means that jurisdictions in which there is currently little realistic hope of such political and social change are being signed up to the CRS. Reviewing the list of participating jurisdictions, we can see countries with very problematic human rights records such as Burkina Faso, Liberia, Kazakhstan among many others.

ILLEGAL TO BE GAY

To focus on LGBT rights for a second, the BBC lists 67 jurisdictions in the world where it is “illegal to be gay”. Of those, 29 are participating jurisdictions for the purposes of CRS, which means they are in the system and exchanging information with other jurisdictions but not necessarily all, and the UK lists 16 of them as ‘reportable Jurisdictions’, that is jurisdictions with which UK actively exchanges information.

The law obliges banks to actively engage with information gathering for these countries, and the actions of the banks will necessarily increase tax takes for those countries.

It is difficult to understand how this can be squared on the one hand with the ever-increasing trend of financial institutions embracing their LGBT staff with the creation of Rainbow Networks and diversity and inclusion campaigns and on the other the active assistance in the tax collecting process for jurisdictions where being gay can get you arrested. It is unlikely a direct donation to these countries would be tolerated. This is to say nothing of the invidious position that LGBT+ staff are placed in if they work either in a financial institution’s or HMRC’s CRS departments.

This is to discuss the personal moral predicament of the individuals that carry out the CRS process. From a wider moral perspective does the urge to stop tax avoidance and evasion by UK residents justify the material assistance given by the British government to regimes the social and political aims of which are so

“From a wider moral perspective does the urge to stop tax avoidance and evasion by UK residents justify the material assistance given by the British government to regimes the social and political aims of which are so far removed from our own in the collection of their tax?”

far removed from our own in the collection of their tax?

This moral calculus has been entirely absent from the debate. Should the UK actively assist in tax collection (by providing information) for a regime such as Azerbaijan, which Human Rights Watch described as waging “a vicious crackdown on critics and dissenting voices”? Or Ghana, which Human Rights Watch described as carrying out “arbitrary arrests and detention of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people”?

The question is why would the UK not sell weapons to a country which it then assists in collecting tax so that country can buy weapons elsewhere? Why would the UK demand human rights violations stop and then help to collect the money with which the person

carrying out those violations is paid? It could be said that providing information to assist in collection is too remote to matter. Or that the benefits – to the UK (including a moral benefit, in the case of tax evasion, and in the case of tax avoidance if one considers tax avoidance to be immoral – some do, some don’t) – outweigh this moral digression.

That is not a question that we can answer concisely here; it is, perhaps, a question that has to be decided by each person for themselves. The issue that we perceive, however, is that it is a question that isn’t even being asked.

We do not believe that the CRS is worthless because it has at its heart this moral tension. We believe that the CRS is a valuable tool in the fight against evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. People should not be able to hide money in banks abroad in breach of their tax obligations. That is fundamentally damaging to our society.

However, we believe that the CRS is not a morality free zone, nor a free win for the UK’s tax authorities, as designed at present it mandates complicity in revenue gathering for regimes that we oppose and decry in all other aspects. Instead, we have proposed that an intermediary status is created whereby countries which meet objective tests about their human rights records are permitted to become participating jurisdictions and the other members continue to collect information on their behalf but do not exchange it until their human rights records improve. That would permit the CRS to be used not only as a tool for anti-avoidance but also as a lever for change in the jurisdictions effected.

Grahame Jackson is a solicitor in Gibraltar who specialises in tax and business. Harriet Brown is a barrister. They authored A Practitioners Guide to International Tax Information Exchange Regimes and present the podcast International Tax Bites

OBITUARY: ROBERT WOODTHORPE BROWNE

Phil Bennion pays tribute to a pillar of international liberalism

Most of you will have heard the news of the sad passing of Robert Woodthorpe Browne on 29 November following a short illness. Robert was a friend to liberal internationalists worldwide and condolences have poured in from our sister parties across the world.

He was chair of Liberal International British Group (LIBG) from 2001-04. Most of us will have known Robert for his chairmanship of the Federal International Relations Committee (FIRC) of the Liberal Democrats for more than a decade before standing down in 2019. This role encompassed leading our delegations to Liberal International and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), and managing bilateral relations with our sister parties worldwide.

Robert transformed our delegation into a cohesive team, with his firm but good-humoured management. I hope, with some optimism, that the team spirit he fostered will be an enduring legacy. He ensured that, as far as possible, we reached a consensus ahead of any votes, bringing a culture of collective responsibility to what became a formidably effective team.

Over the years Robert forged strong alliances with the major parties in ALDE, such as the German FDP and the two Dutch parties, VVD and D66, ensuring that the Liberal Democrat delegation was a major force in European politics. He was held in the highest regard by our allies, extending to a deep affection from many, such as his great friend Manfred Eisenbach from the FDP and former LI and ALDE president, the late Hans van Baalen. Robert was exceedingly good company at congresses, but his charm was matched by good judgement. He knew which battles to fight and which to let pass, almost always delivering the best achievable outcomes for us.

Robert will be missed even more at Liberal International, where he served on the bureau first as treasurer, then as vice president. When he stood down in July last year at the Sofia congress, he was given the rare honour of being made a patron of Liberal International, giving him lifelong ex-officio membership of the bureau.

Robert was always willing to drop everything and fly anywhere to resolve a crisis or represent LI at an international event. He had particularly strong links with our African sister parties, having helped foster the expansion of liberalism across the continent. Robert had a paternal relationship with the staff at LI headquarters at the National Liberal Club in London and they are heartbroken at his passing. At the time of his death, he was continuing to work on several projects with our secretariat.

Although he was raised near London and eventually moved back to his home city, Robert and his wife Barbara made their home for 30 years in the rural West Midlands in the small village of Broad Marston, a few miles from both Evesham and Stratford upon Avon. Whilst there he established an area of woodland and developed a strong interest in forestry management. Both he and Barbara served spells on their local Pebworth parish council. It was as a fellow aspiring candidate for the European Parliament that I first met Robert before the 1999 European elections, the first fought on a regional list system. We immediately became friends and Robert gave both myself and Liz Lynne tremendous support as MEPs for the region.

Robert joined the Liberal Party in 1960. He stood several times for Westminster as well as the European Parliament. His Westminster forays were against high profile opponents such as Tony Blair in 2005 and Michael Portillo a few years earlier. Robert has also chaired the Parliamentary Candidates Association from 1997-2000. He had a long active life in non-party international politics through the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House) where he was a board member and he was a founding director of the Paddy Ashdown Forum.

Robert was educated at St Ignatius College then spent some time in France to improve his language skills straight after school. He worked for Zuerich Unfall in Barcelona for a year before enrolling at the University of Barcelona. He also studied Spanish at Birkbeck College (London University). After university he developed his career in insurance, soon setting up on his own, specialising in the reinsurance market. He was a pioneer in opening this market across Africa and later in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union after its fall. He was honoured by his industry becoming Master of the Worshipful Company of World Traders for the year 2017.

Robert is survived by his German wife Barbara, whom he met in Switzerland and married in Barcelona in 1966 and by their son Robert and two grandchildren.

Robert will be long remembered for his energetic promotion of liberalism worldwide and by his family and many friends who will miss the conviviality of his company.

Phil Bennion is a member of the Liberal International Bureau and a former MEP for the West Midlands



Robert
Woodthorpe
Brown MBE
1943-2022

Shown with
his beloved
wife Barbara

LETTERS

TRANSPHOBIA DEFINITION

Dear Liberator,

Both Lord Strasburger and Mary Regnier-Wilson (Liberator 415) are wrong. The party's new definition of transphobia is a shameful capitulation of the party's values that will be used by transphobes to harm trans members and supporters.

The party's interpretation of equality, one of three core values in the preamble to the Liberal Democrat constitution, is now downgraded; its definition subjective. It has to be asked whether racists, misogynists and homophobes will use the new definition to justify the expression of discriminatory views on dubious libertarian 'free speech' grounds while denying the harm they do.

Importantly, the revised definition of transphobia produced without reference to the party's relevant equality specified associated organisation, LGBT+, and omitted the worked examples of what does and doesn't constitute acceptable behaviour. RB got it right to say that the result of this is a mess, but did so for the wrong reasons - the result will be a revival of transphobic bullying by party members in the face of legal threats against disciplinary action. Capitulating to bigotry is not a particularly Liberal behaviour. It is also bad politics.

It is equally unfortunate that Liberator itself has used the ridiculous misnomer of so-called "gender-critical" beliefs - they should be called transphobic, for the same reason as claiming any form of discrimination can be "respectable" would be considered unacceptable by any liberal.

We have now seen a set of internal elections which showed there is barely any support for transphobes, of whom a number stood in a slate clearly organised with identically typeset manifestos. Lord Strasburger may well find himself in a minority of one on the new Federal Board. That board may

choose to look at the more relevant legal precedent in this case - not Forstater, which is an issue of employment law, but the ASLEF case which proves that holding bigoted views can be ruled incompatible

with membership of an organisation that stands in opposition to such discrimination.

It is time Liberals and Liberator readers got a grip, and acknowledged that core principles of equality are not compatible with transphobic hatred.

Gareth Epps
West Oxfordshire

WEALTH OF NATIONS

Dear Liberator,

Although there has been talk of enhanced inheritance, income and property taxes on the rentier class, William Tranby does Liberals a favour by raising the less discussed a wealth tax (Liberator 415).

Dividends, bonuses, investments and land values have all increased for at least the last decade much faster than stagnating if not declining earned income.

Gross inequality is unacceptable to progressives. Rentiers benefit both from new money and the less mentioned old money - some stately home owners no longer need to open to the public.

A straightforward wealth tax is not a magic bullet but would raise useful money. The altruistic rich might even welcome it. And it would reinforce the ailing levelling up agenda.

Wealth is sometimes difficult to monetise so for its first year it should be limited to 1%. The next year it should be 5% narrowing to 3 and 1% in the next two years.

And, I bet, some of the rich would be even wealthier at the end of it.

Roger Jenking
Oxford

TWO VOTES FOR SCOTLAND

Dear Liberator,

The pro-independence rallies held in towns and cities across Scotland on the evening after the Supreme Court's ruling on the right of Holyrood to hold Indyref2 suggest that, while the legal niceties may have been tidied away to Westminster's satisfaction, the political question remains unanswered: how do the voters of a member nation of a supposedly voluntary union trigger a process of orderly secession from that union, if a majority so wish?

Given that referenda are lengthy, divisive and expensive, the Scots surely need an enabling 'Stage 1' mechanism of some sort.

Accordingly, the idea is that Scottish voters be given the power to decide when, if ever, there should be another referendum on independence, which could be achieved by Westminster's legislating to conduct a 'preliminary poll' of Scots coterminous with the next UK general election, such a poll to determine whether the Scots want a referendum on independence in the new Parliament, with such legislation embodying provision for a second referendum, should the Scots want it.

This additional poll could become a permanent feature of all future Westminster elections in Scotland and could be extended for use in Wales and Northern Ireland.

A Westminster-approved 'preliminary poll' of this nature would settle the future of the union for the foreseeable future by putting the voters of the Celtic nations, rather than politicians, in the driving seat. It would enable Scots of every political persuasion on both sides of the independence debate to determine whether they want a referendum and to make that decision in a considered and timely fashion at the same time as they were electing representatives to preside over the governance of the union.

Westminster should adopt it as a conciliatory, continuing and open-handed gesture, evidencing confidence in a union where membership is nevertheless acknowledged to be voluntary.

David Green
Southport



REVIEWS

Partnership & Politics in a Divided Decade by Vince Cable and Rachel Smith Real Press 2022

Usually, an autobiography offers a first-hand account of one person's life. This offers two for the price of one, as Vince Cable and Rachel Smith waltz through the events they were part of between 2010-20.

While the book is clearly set in two parts; the coalition, and life after, Vince and Rachel's contributions follow chronologically

As one might expect from one of the key actors in the 2010-15 Government, Vince Cable dives into his diaries and press cuttings to remind the reader of the Liberal Democrat contribution to the coalition, from the pupil premium to shared parental leave, raising the tax threshold to the triple lock pension, the green investment bank to same sex marriage, but he also defends the unpopular decisions, such as reigning in public spending and raising tuition fees.

Rachel's contributions are drawn from a journal she started in 1996. She reveals her past as a political animal, a campaigner against apartheid and for more affordable rural housing, before becoming, in her words "a political wife", following her marriage to Cable.

Between them they offer recollections of the time and events from different perspectives while giving the reader an insight to two different lives, one the high-profile political spokesperson and commentator, later Government minister and party leader, the other a farmer juggling support for her husband while worrying about blue tongue vaccinations and family commitments.

The immediate period after the 2010 general election attracts some detail from both Vince and Rachel as they express their shared concerns about a coalition with the Conservatives.

Vince confirms what others have written about when chronicling the days that led to the coalition being formed, that Nick Clegg wasn't keen to negotiate with Labour until Gordon Brown resigned as prime minister. Preliminary talks did take place, but did not progress, with Vince noting how three of Labour's five-strong team were not interested.

This appears crucial in turning Cable's concerns about an agreement with the Tories, into a recommendation to colleagues to accept the arithmetic and help form a stable government at a time of economic emergency.

Vince suggests an unhappiness that while he had important work as the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, he was not at the centre of the Coalition decision making. He describes how he felt Clegg and Cameron wanted him on board, but not on the bridge. Nevertheless, he makes clear his admiration and respect for Nick Clegg and understanding of the difficult position he has got himself and his party in.

Vince records the successes of the Government, many of them in his department creating and saving jobs, particularly in the car industry, while explaining, often in detail, where things went wrong or not to plan. Despite the daily challenges, press sensationalism, and constant criticism from inside and outside the Coalition, this was a very stable Government compared to what was to follow.

While Rachel's thought's often mirror those of her husband, her experiences never quite match the glamour enjoyed by Vince. Watching from the side as he enjoys participating in Strictly Come Dancing, she reveals the essential support a spouse can give, such as sorting out a spare tyre following a blow out on the way to a party event where Vince has to deliver a speech.

There's little respite after leaving office at the invitation of the electorate or when returning in 2017

to take on the leadership of the party.

Throughout the book Vince and Rachel reveal their political outlook on events with the background and detail provided by one, and personal observations about people and places recorded by the other.

Indeed, it is Rachel's remarks on royals and politicians from home and overseas that are a treat, describing the Duke of Kent as an old waxwork, and Tony Blair as a perma-tanned ghost of his former self at a banquet for President Obama. But she also covers the stresses and strains she can see her husband coping with as he jets around the world on behalf of the country and around the UK delivering speeches and often having to deliver a government line he only half-agrees with.

This combination works well, makes for a more interesting and colourful background to the dry and serious machinations of political events, and certainly confirms what a great team they are and how important good partnerships are in life as well as politics.

Adrian Sanders

Pandemic Diaries by Matt Hancock Backbite £25

I confess to being a bit of an anorak about diaries, and in particular diaries by politicians. They have an immediacy, and sense of intimacy and vulnerability which autobiographies and memoirs lack.

The list of diarists who provide a valuable insight into political decision-making is long and honourable – in post-war years from Macmillan to Crossman, Benn, Campbell and even Ashdown – but it cannot be said that Matt Hancock's offering should sit on a bookshelf alongside any of these.

Diaries should be contemporaneous, recounting current events and opinions – and then subject to editing, possibly by a historian or academic. By that benchmark, Hancock's offering is not really a diary. Drawn from notes, minutes, emails and "interviews with many of the participants", it follows a day-by-day narrative of events and is then subject to a make-over by journalist Isabel Oakeshott who helped Hancock "remember the most telling detail ... improving

my drafting to create a compelling account second to none".

Well, it certainly is second to none, since Hancock's offering is the first book on the pandemic produced by the key participants. It may be that others, both medical and political, have decided that a period of reflection might be prudent. Also, they continued to work in tackling the challenges of Covid while, as we know, Hancock didn't last the pace. A surveillance camera and what appeared to be an almost stage-managed grope and cuddle ensured that he could spend more time – if not in the political backwater of his family – by at least starting to reposition himself somewhere on the fringes of entertainment. (And what will be next? The part of King Rat in a provincial pantomime would be my guess.)

This book would be better were Hancock to have seen it as a memoir – indeed, he specifically rejects such a term – and the reader cannot help feeling that, instead of a book chronicling events in the present, it is written with an eye on the future, and in particular on the inquiry which Hancock says he welcomes and it gives the impression, in rugby parlance, of Hancock "wanting to get his retaliation in first". Key is the question of how and when Britain went into lockdown. An MPs' report has already said Britain was too slow in locking down, with ministers reluctant to challenge the scientific advice, and it is a moot point whether Hancock was "guided by" or "following" the medical advice. He tries to have it both ways: "During the early lockdown decisions, we as ministers followed the advice of our scientific advisors. So in that specific case it is correct to say we 'followed' the science. But in a much broader sense, we were guided by the science. Advisors advise, ministers decide".

It is understandable that politicians might wish to hide behind their advisors. It would be a brave man who, in the face of a pandemic, rejected the views and opinions of chief medical officers and the like. But they should have the decency to admit that – possibly like everyone else – they were in uncharted waters and errors of judgement were inevitable.

That could be excused. What cannot be easily forgiven is

Hancock's insouciance about the provision of PPE equipment and the situation in care homes. The scandal of dodgy contracts (I had to laugh at his dismissive comments about Baroness Mone and he falls back on a defence of "We had to get the stuff so it didn't matter how and from where" – not a direct quote – and I have personal knowledge of how the Government were paying far more than they needed for identical products by buying from their friends and cronies) will prove one of the main grounds for opprobrium about his and the Government's conduct.

Credit should be due, of course, to the speed with which a vaccine was produced and making millions of doses available abroad and Hancock takes this credit, while glossing over responsibility for the shambolic 'test and trace' programme and the lack of a robust pandemic response strategy.

Hancock also has his own personal bêtes-noires. Dominic Cummings is an interfering narcissist; Public Health England is portrayed as consistently incompetent; and he sees Nicola Sturgeon and Andy Burnham as only concerned with scoring political points, while many might argue that their responses to the pandemic were more considered than the Government's.

The book's most interesting part is the epilogue where Hancock reflects on events but it is hard not to see the whole as Hancock's attempt to tell his own story in a way which justifies his every action but which may prove to be discredited as scrutiny and history judge the Government's handling of the pandemic: when he does admit to having made an error, it is of the "If-I-have-a-fault-it's-that-I-work-too-hard" type. The book would benefit from an index or, at least, a timeline so to give the reader a handy reminder of the sequence of events (when did Cummings go to Barnard Castle?). Not a diary to which I will return.

Nick Winch

Show Me The Bodies; how we let Grenfell happen by Peter Apps Oneworld 2022

Apps calls the Grenfell tower fire the most serious crime committed on British soil this century and while - unlike say the Manchester Arena bombing - no-one intentionally killed 72 people, this horrifying and forensic account ought to shock on two levels.

Apps in alternating chapters tells both the harrowing story of what happened on the night of the fire, but also how Grenfell's owner came to clad it in what was in effect solid petrol, how such products came to be on the market and why the Building Regulations allowed them to be used despite the dangers being amply known.

I must declare an interest. Apps is deputy editor of Inside Housing - a position I held 23 years ago - and I've occasionally worked for him including a couple of days of news reporting covering the Grenfell inquiry.

Grenfell is the story of how what should have been an easily extinguished fire in a fridge freezer turned into an inferno.

Firefighters present on the night had not been trained in what to do if a fire consumed an entire tower because the fire brigade did not think it was possible. They worked on the basis that flats were compartmentalised and so they could extinguish a blaze in one with little or no impact on others.

But the Grenfell fire spread up the exterior of the tower rather than from flat to flat leaving firefighters baffled at the speed of spread and at a loss how to fight it.

Compartmentalisation should have meant the 'stay put' advice worked, but was irrelevant to a fire spreading rapidly up outside walls, and residents were told to stay in their flats past the point when many might have survived had they taken the dangerous but possible route out. Fire brigade policy on 'stay put' was rigid; no-one had the imagination to see an alternative could be needed.

The reason for the speed of spread was that Grenfell had been clad in panels that contained solid petrol between aluminium sheets. Worse, a purely aesthetic feature on the

roof made of the same material spread the fire quickly from one face of the tower to the other three.

How this happened needs considerable technical dissection - at which Apps is as clear as anyone could be for a lay audience.

Did you know the UK is the only developed country apart from South Korea that does not insist on a second escape staircase in tower blocks? Me neither, and the book is full of vital detail like that.

Essentially, the cladding industry had a product it knew could catch fire but wanted to keep selling it. It was cheaper than alternatives and so attractive to landlords such as Kensington & Chelsea's Tenant Management Organisation - which was responsible for Grenfell and despite its name an arm of the council.

Lobbyists for construction product manufacturers found themselves pushing at an open door with governments of all kinds that saw regulation as an evil in itself, especially while the Coalition's 'two regulations out for one new in' approach ruled. Incidentally, the Coalition-era Lib Dem minister Stephen Williams does not emerge from this book covered in glory.

As concerns mounted about the cladding, including from Grenfell residents, the industry, civil service and politicians all accepted assurances from each other that nothing was wrong and treated residents as nuisances to ignore as best they could.

After the fire, Kensington & Chelsea's response was so incompetent and heartless that even the Tory communities secretary Sajid Javid removed its leader and chief executive.

It was then realised that hundreds of other blocks - some private, some social housing - had similar cladding, leading to leaseholders across the country now trapped in unsaleable flats and faced with huge bills through no fault of their own.

Ultimately Grenfell was a failure of regulation, or more precisely of deregulation, and of fear of offending business interests.

Apps has done a considerable service in bringing all this to light and it remains to be seen when the second part of the public inquiry reports whether lessons have been learnt.

Mark Smulian

Invasion: Russia's Bloody War and Ukraine's Fight for Survival by Luke Harding Guardian Faber £20

This book may be a first draft of history, but it is an informative and moving one. The Guardian's Luke Harding brings to it the benefit of decades of experience reporting in Russia and Ukraine. You may have been following the war assiduously, but this tome provides big picture political context that can be lacking in daily media reports.

Harding is especially good on Russia's sense of victimhood, its persisting imperial ambitions following the USSR's late 20th century humiliation, and its certainty that Ukraine is not a legitimate country. He dismantles Putin's claims that it is Russia's right to eliminate Ukrainian state sovereignty, and that Ukrainians don't exist as a people: they are brother Russians. And yet Putin sees it as his destiny to kill this fraternal race, clumsily, thoughtlessly destroying everything so he can declare a wasteland as Russian soil.

Most depressing is the realisation that Putin is not alone in believing this patronising colonialist nonsense: he has the majority of the Russian people behind him. Even on those rare occasions when the truth filters through Putin's iron curtain of unknowing, it seems the public is concerned by the deaths of Russian soldiers, not Ukrainian civilians. We know ordinary Russians are frightened of the all-powerful state security services, just as their Soviet grandparents were, and their serf ancestors were. Yet, it is hard to feel much sympathy when so many citizens deliberately turn away from Russia's own brave sources of unbiased information.

The behaviour of Russia's undisciplined and untrained troops is reminiscent of Soviet soldiers sacking Berlin in 1945, stealing everything they can lift. In the case of Ukraine, they come armed with lists of civic leaders to torture and kill. One marvels at the stupidity of the hierarchical Russian military machine. In the area surrounding Chernobyl, soldiers were made to dig trenches in forests that

are deeply contaminated with radioactive waste, thereby condemning them to a painful death in months or years.

Harding does not offer any predictions about the outcome or the length of this war. However, through interviews with dozens of Ukrainians of all backgrounds, he paints a picture of a bloody-minded people who distrust politicians and prize independence.

“We are motivated to defend our homeland,” he is told repeatedly, whereas the Russians “have no idea why they are here.”

I would have liked more on the feeble response of Macron in particular. Does he, Blair-like, believe his brilliance and charm can persuade Putin to call a halt to this war so we can all be chums once more? Why does he believe anything Putin tells him? How can a world leader be so naïve about human nature? Perhaps, like Scholz of Germany, Macron cannot bear to confront the depressing but obvious conclusion that if we fail to contain Russia, war will be coming to neighbourhood near us.

Rebecca Tinsley

Russia's War on Everybody, and What it Means for You by Keir Giles Bloomsbury Press 2023

“You may not be interested in Russia, but Russia is interested in you”. Russia’s paranoia since the fall of the Soviet Union has led to its modern-day war with Ukraine and hybrid warfare with much of the rest of the world, especially ‘the West’. This hybrid warfare includes ‘all of society’ attacks involving the weakening of countries via misinformation, divide and rule tactics and encouraging the mistrust of democratic governments.

Keir Giles, senior consulting fellow for the Russia and Eurasia programme at Chatham House and director of the Conflict Studies Research Centre, has been warning about Russia for decades, saying that President Vladimir Putin and others have always viewed Russia as being at war with the West without open warfare. The West was wrong to consider we were at peace.

Putin knows exactly how to

destabilise other countries, but he wants Russians to think the reverse is happening. This is because the paranoia is real and he believes the West wants to destroy Russia. Because of this he neglects the Russian people and mainly focuses on foreign affairs.

Giles dedicates his book to Putin for finally convincing the world of Russia’s evil intentions through the invasion of Ukraine. However, it is far more than a book about the war in Ukraine and delves into Giles’s extensive knowledge of the country, the people and the regime. This is an interesting and informative book. A good read but without an optimistic ending.

In a chapter entitled ‘Nobody is too unimportant’ Giles outlines how ordinary citizens throughout the world, including in the UK, can become entangled by Russian hostile operations. For example, the cloning of passports of Russian visitors, the targeting of civilians living near to NATO bases, or cyberattacks on members of particular, rather ordinary, groups that could be of use in the future.

Most people are aware of Russian disinformation and how elections such as Trump’s in the US or a referendum such as Brexit in the UK may well have been highly influenced by Russia, but they do not see how it has affected themselves on a personal level. Yet Russian operatives are expert, and this is what they do on a daily basis – destabilise and subvert. This is not just in countries of interest such as NATO members and African states.

Russian ministers and ambassadors are also excellent at using poker faces to deny and counter truths that are blatantly obvious. “We did not invade Ukraine.” “It is a special operation.” Unfortunately, some international politicians and even states believe or pretend to believe the propaganda, or broadcast whatever Russia wants them to.

Russia sees itself as a great power and therefore a global actor which must have a global presence. For example, African countries may be used as platforms for Russian disinformation. Ireland might naively believe it’s not a target due to its ‘neutrality’. Russia and its leaders must be seen as strong and anyone who does not stand up to them is seen as weak. Dialogue and

diplomacy have little impact.

At a time when most of the West wanted to ignore Russia, Putin invaded Ukraine in order to control or annex it. Instead, Ukraine has become part of the West and the West has become hostile to Russia in the way Putin feared. Also, NATO enlargement on Russia’s borders will happen. The fear is that things can only get worse and it is essential for the rest of Europe that Russia should not succeed in Ukraine. There is also the possibility of Russia becoming a global terrorist state.

So, what can be done about all of this? Helping individuals who are directly intimidated might be difficult without far more expenditure on security, and some online Russian targets end up having their profiles boosted by the attention and do not feel under threat. Many Russia enablers in the UK – politicians, academics and others - know exactly what they are doing while others are unwitting, unpaid accomplices often categorised as ‘useful idiots’. In the past the latter might have been hoping that Russia could develop into a peaceful neighbour in Europe, but there can be no excuses now.

We need to look at the long-term trends. Many Liberals in the West have tried to foster a more benign Russia and hoped a new generation might bring about change after Putin. This won’t happen and this book is about Russia’s war. Russia is more than one man. It is at war with all of us, so the UK needs to defend itself in conjunction with the rest of Europe. Collectively and individually.

There is no reassuring ending to this book. We have left it too late, especially in the UK by permitting those on the payroll and the useful idiots to allow the government to turn a blind eye to disinformation, to subversion, to destabilisation, to the undermining of our democratic processes and to the extensive laundering of dirty money. Although there is more happening in the areas of cybersecurity and anti-psychological warfare now, it all seems set to continue indefinitely.

In a coda, Giles does actually express the possibility of some optimism further down the line. There is more opposition to Putin in Russia now due to the war,

the sanctions and the economic downturn. If Russia fails badly in Ukraine, there could be a gradual change in thinking. Meanwhile, he says: "Russia is everybody's problem, and it's not going away any time soon."

Carol Weaver

Ted Kennedy, A Life by John A Farrell Penguin Press 2022

Was Ted Kennedy a liberal Democrat? The sense of an ending, an assurance lost and found permeates this memoir of a man whose mystique and yet singularity seemed to promise a long career trajectory, enveloping liberalism, and its descent during the Reagan years, and the US's slide into today's tendentiousness.

Ted Kennedy continually reached across the divide even as he saw the end of a coalition era. Hamstrung by constant fracas and the shadow of Chappaquiddick, he tried to live up to his brothers Joseph Jr., John, and Robert. He served as a United States Senator Massachusetts for close to 47 years, from 1962 until his demise in 2009. And he had the square jawline and looks to match.

Kennedy played a vital rôle in passing new laws, inclusive of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the National Cancer Act of 1971, the COBRA health insurance provision, the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Poster-boy of the left, perhaps, but he was also lionhearted; and in his final years he bouyed-up a new form of American liberalism.

In delineating Kennedy's life of misfortune, persistence, and service to others, John Farrell brings together a knotty, problematic picture of a man who like his family - loved the nation he served. Ted Kennedy is buried at Arlington National Cemetery near his brothers John and Robert.

Kevin Thompson

The Dragon Daughter and other Lin Lan Fairy Tales Edited and translated by Juwen Zhang Princeton 2022 £14.99

Is this the mellow lin-lan-lone of evening bells? Far-far-away being apposite, as echoes of Perrault and the brothers Grimm are retold amongst their siblings on eastern shores. Li Xiaofeng and his colleagues collected in reinterpreted folk stories in China from the 1920s under the Lin Lan pseudonyms. Folk stories often contain universals, the 'Cinderella' story is common to many cultures; the earliest known version of Ye Xian was first published during the T'ang dynasty around 850, purporting to have taken place before the Qin and Han dynasties (c.200 BCE). In our own ethnocentric little world, the Viking raids were probably the main feature. However, the efforts of Duan Chengshi though probably gathered from peasants, like his precursors and followers, were written for elites. Just as the stories collected (and modified) by the Grimms, Hans Christian Andersen et al, were part of a Romantic nationalism and cultural awareness. Li Xiaofeng and his colleagues saw part of their role as educating and raising popular consciousness.

The Qing dynasty collapsed in 1912, having been under assault from western and Japanese imperialisms for the previous 70 years. Prior to the century of humiliation, China was probably the largest economy on Earth and is now reasserting itself as such. Li Xiaofeng and his colleagues saw part of their role as educating and popular consciousness raising. Working in the 1920s and 1930s, it is not difficult to see how their efforts faded – the second Sino-Japanese war (I wonder why our histories don't start World War II in 1937?). There had been skirmishing throughout the 1930s, Shanghai, home of the Lin Lan's publisher, was attacked by the Japanese in 1932 and captured after a significant and long-drawn-out battle in 1937.

After 1945 came the civil war with the Communists triumphing. Perhaps more specifically significant was the westernising switch from a vertical to horizontal setting of type in China, making reprints costly outside of Taiwan.

As the title suggests, these are fairy stories, more specifically tonghua, and dwell in the realm of the superstition, so despite their

peasant or proletarian pedigree, they would run counter to the orthodoxy of Communists. Li Xiaofeng appears to have retreated from public life after the 1940s until his death in 1971.

Zhou Zuoren, his collaborator, who introduced the concept of tonghua to China, died in 1967. Zhao Jingshen survived the Cultural Revolution, Zhao being made honorary president of the Chinese Institute of Folk Literature, when it was founded in the year before his death, 1985. He had taught at the Fudan University until his retirement and folklore studies are now widely pursued in Chinese universities.

Fudan, on the other hand, changed its constitution in December 2019, removing the phrase "academic independence and freedom of thought" and replacing it with a "pledge to follow the Communist party's leadership". Shape shifting is a recurring feature in the stories, hardly surprising as it features in Chinese reality – consider how Deng Xiaoping transformed Marxist-Leninism into a 'Socialist Market Economy'.

Juwen Zhang escapes the problem of many folklorists by presenting stories. His analysis is largely focussed on the publisher, New North Books and its collectors, interpreters and authors. It may not be known where the stories were collected, although Anthony Christie (author of Chinese Mythology. Paul Hamlyn 1968), who is aware of Lin Lan as a source, speaks of the story of Meng Jiang Nü as pre-Han in its origins, developing around the time of the construction of the Great Wall and popularised from Ming times. Christie suggests that Lin Lan stories are derived from "different sources and provides a good example of an evolved Chinese folkstory."

But enough of this, we simply must thank Juwen Zhang and Princeton for bringing us these tales; hopefully they will consider an audio book, because they come from an oral tradition and are best read aloud.

Stewart Rayment

Saturday

I hope you had as good a Christmas as I did – it always snows at the Hall on Christmas Eve, which helps put one in the right mood. But life cannot be all ‘Deck the Halls’ and Ecclefechan tarts: there is work for us to do. Our party may have its back to the wall, but if we keep our shoulders to the wheel and our noses to the grindstone, we shall prove the dismal Jimmies wrong and keep the flag of freedom burning. (I have been making this speech ever since Lloyd George did the dirty on us in 1918 and it always Goes Down Well.)

Sunday

There I was at my Home for Well-Behaved Orphans on Boxing Day with a sack of presents (chocolate for the inmates, gin for Matron), when I happened to glance out of the window and spied a fellow whom I did not recognise gathering winter fuel. A passing orphan, who proved not only Well Behaved but also Well Informed, told me that the aforementioned scavenger lived in the Rutland Alps near the forest fence (erected, no doubt, by my ancestors to stop the environment getting out) and next to a fountain (which must be Very Handy). What with it being Christmas and all, I sent to the Hall for cold drumsticks, a bottle of my second-best claret and some pine logs. When they arrived I set off with the Well-Informed Orphan to deliver them.

The snow was deep and crisp and even, and the WIO found the going rather heavy. Luckily, I was wearing my patent Steam-Heated Boots for Winter Focus Delivery, so I advised him to tread in my footsteps. He reported that heat was in the very sod I had printed – at least, I think that’s what he said. We found the fuel-gatherer by the fountain and, I am pleased to report, the cold chicken and wine were well received. Unfortunately, the pine logs had all been used to fuel my boots.

Monday

Have you come across podcasts? They are like the wireless, except that the people talking will wait for you if you want to use the thunder box or recharge your tumbler of Auld Johnston, that most prized of Highland malts. Among the most popular, I am told, are ‘The Rest is Politics’ and ‘The Rest is History’. Inspired by their success, I have started a snooker podcast under the title ‘The Rest is Under the Table’.

Tuesday

To the village, where I find the queue for Mr Patel’s shop wrapped three times round the green before it disappears into the churchyard of St Asquith’s and the fields beyond. Who should I find surveying the scene with satisfaction but my old friend the Wise Woman of Wing? “It’s this new energy drink I’ve produced with the Elves of Rockingham Forest,” she explains. “It’s an old recipe of mine, and they’ve added some of their secret herbs – and a drop of what killed Aunty, I shouldn’t wonder. Whatever they’ve done, it keeps the punters coming back for more.” When I inquire into the business side of the project, she becomes animated. “I’ve had my solicitor go through the contract with a nit comb, dearie. There isn’t going to be any nonsense about High Elven Law meaning they’re entitled to an extra twenty per cent this time. It’s strictly fifty-fifty all the way.”

Lord Bonkers’ Diary

Wednesday

Scandal has engulfed a further three cabinet ministers. Their offences vary: one has been accused of selling the greater part of Wiltshire to Russian oligarchs; a second appears to have been doling out the chairmanships of government committees in return for the loan of twenty pounds till Friday; and the third is widely suspected of committing arson in His Majesty’s dockyards. Yet the airwaves are choked with

Conservatives maintaining that there is no need for any of them to resign. Well, I beg to differ, and I find this evening that the balance of opinion in the public bar of the Bonkers’ Arms favours my side of the argument.

Thursday

The morning post includes a gratifyingly large cheque drawn on a Toronto bank. I have long been a patron of the arts, and from time to time have dabbled on the creative side of things too. You will know of my part in the Rutbeat movement of the Sixties and perhaps of the success of my film studios and its ‘Oakham Comedies’ in the immediate post-war years. What you may not know is that I also wrote what has turned out to be the most successful play ever produced on the Canadian stage: The Moosetrap. In the construction of this whodunit I made the great Agatha Christie my study, and played about with the conventions of the genre (as we theatrical folk say) just as she did. In particular, I presented the audience with a cast that Did Not Include A Butler, thus leaving them in the dark as to who had committed the murder until the end of the play.

Friday

To the new Liberal Democrat HQ in Vincent Square (or that may be the name of the helpful chap on the desk – I got caught in the rain on the way back to St Pancras and my notes have run rather). I arrive to find the place in turmoil: our own dear leader, Ed Davey, has placed a bucket over his head and is resisting all entreaties to take it off. Vincent Square (if that is his name) explains that someone has just mentioned the European Union to Davey, and that the only way to persuade him to remove the aforementioned pail is for us all to climb into the ornamental fish tank that dominates the entrance lobby and sing ‘Jerusalem’. So your diarist, Vincent Square, the lovely Sarah Green MP and a bicycle courier who arrived at the mot juste brave the angelfish and give it both barrels. Sure enough, our leader is soon bucketless.

Conversation turns to what we shall do if another MP mentions the EU (perhaps quite innocently) while Davey is seated in the chamber. I suggest keeping a collapsible canvass tank behind the Speaker’s chair so that backbench Lib Dem MPs can leap into it at a moment’s notice to sing. “But how would we fill it?” asks one Bright Young Thing. “Oh,” I airily reply, “through the usual channels.”

Lord Bonkers, who was Liberal MP for Rutland South West 1906-10, opened his diary to Jonathan Calder.